

Voices of the Undereducated in Adult Education and Training in Ontario:
A Phenomenographic Approach

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies

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Abstract

This doctoral study was an exploration of the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults (at or below a high school level of formal education) reported their experiences of participation in adult education and training (AET) programmes offered by publicly funded school boards or their arms-length affiliate in the province of Ontario. In light of a low participation rate in the Canadian AET system by undereducated adults, the rationale was to examine whether or not AET programmes are meeting the needs of undereducated adults beyond a narrow focus on an instrumental approach associated with human capital development. This study was located in a theoretical framework consisting of (a) learning theory, (b) motivations for participation, (c) general barriers to participation, (d) structural barriers to participation, and (e) transformative learning. The purposive sample consisted of 11 participants between the ages of 18-58 who were drawn from service providers in 4 geographic regions of Ontario. Data collection consisted of (a) demographics, (b) voice recordings from face-to-face participant interviews, (c) participant weekly critical incident reports, and (d) researcher reflexive journal notes. Data were analyzed in accordance with a phenomenographic approach within a constructivist/interpretivist research paradigm. Findings revealed 4 qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adult learners reported their experiences of participation in AET and were reported as the voice of (a) security, (b) engagement, (c) relationship, and (d) competency. Implications to theory and practice and to further inquiry were outlined.

Keywords: adult education; participation; undereducated; qualitative; phenomenography

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the financial support given in part for this doctoral research study from the Brick Robb Memorial Scholarship fund awarded by the Provincial Scholarship Committee of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation and from Graduate Fellowships and Research Fellowships awarded by Brock University.

I sincerely thank Dr. Michael Kompf, Professor, Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education, Brock University, who acted as my academic advisor throughout the duration of my doctoral programme and who offered ongoing and valuable academic guidance, support, and encouragement. I also sincerely thank Dr. Renée Kuchapski, Chair & Associate Professor, Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education, Brock University and Dr. Ron Hansen, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario, who both acted as valuable members of my doctoral committee and who provided their time, expertise, and academic advice on my research portfolio, proposal, and dissertation.

Finally, I dearly thank my family including my husband, Richard Maingot, and my children, Matthew, Adam, and Samantha, for their love, understanding, and patience throughout the 6 years of my doctoral journey.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Adult education and training (AET) in Canada is a complex system that offers adults of all ages a wide variety of learning opportunities from credential-bearing programmes to other structured and nonstructured learning activities. I have spent much of my career in the field of AET as both an adult educator and a programme developer in a continuing education department of an Ontario publicly funded school board. My role in programme development is to help prepare adults to enter or re-enter the labour market. This requires me to secure sources of funding from federal, provincial, and municipal governments, and design AET programmes that align with Ontario Ministry of Education requirements for earning the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. These programmes provide skills training which prepares adults for current labour-market demands or entry to postsecondary education.

Over the past 15 years, I have seen many changes to government funding models for AET. Historically, the federal government of Canada played a more direct role in AET, but withdrew from direct training in 1996. Over the period of 1996–2006, the federal government transferred responsibility for training to the provinces through the Labour Market Development Agreements, but retained jurisdiction for adult training to certain groups including EI clients, Aboriginal Canadians, youth, older workers, and persons with disabilities (Brisbois & Saunders, 2005). My experience bears out that project-based training at the federal level was popular 20 years ago and still exists for targeted, marginalized groups, but that this model has been mostly replaced with a client-centred approach. Rather than institutions receiving a block of funding to offer a particular training programme, where eligible individuals (clients) were ushered into

these funded programmes, most funding for retraining now is put into the hands of the clients.

The client-centred model *appears* to give students more choice as to which programme may better serve their needs. However, this model has put the onus on adults to source out funding for which they may be eligible, access the funding successfully, research a career path that would likely result in securing a job, and find an education/training provider that offers a suitable labour-market programme. In my opinion, the move to encourage adults to become responsible for researching an appropriate career path and to take the steps necessary to apply for and become successful at securing government funding has merit in its own right such that the adults have an opportunity to feel they have some control over this important life decision. However, this client-centred approach can present difficulties and can act as a systemic barrier for some people as discussed below.

As an educator and programme developer in AET, I have had the experience of seeing many adult students learn, grow, achieve, and succeed at not only moving into a new career, but also in having developed a greater sense of confidence, self-esteem, and meaningfulness through their learning. Consequently, I have typically supported the Canadian and Ontario AET systems in their objectives. However, as much as I have supported the aims of the AET system, there were times when I questioned whether it was equitable for all adults. I have also experienced a proportion of students with respect to any given AET programme who did not qualify for funding to take the programme; began the programme, but later withdrew due to stringent programme requirements. There were also students who completed the programme, but were unsuccessful in

accessing the labour market for which they had been trained either immediately following or within a three-month monitoring period following completion of the programme.

The AET system can act as a systemic barrier to adults if information about access to funding is difficult to find or understand or the funding eligibility guidelines and windows for funding access are too stringent. Other systemic barriers could include labour-market statistics that are difficult to interpret or information about AET programmes, that would likely result in a positive labour-market outcome, is not clear and easily accessible. A further systemic barrier for adults could be that choices of AET programmes, under the guidelines of government funding agencies, are limited. An example of stringency is the stay-at-home parent who is ready to upgrade his/her skills for the labour market, but does not qualify for a government-funded labour-market training programme.

Systemic barriers can also be present at the classroom level. For example, students indicated that they felt their teacher or programme supervisor was not understanding or supportive when they (a) had difficulties juggling school attendance and situational life problems, (b) were dealing with deep-seated feelings of fear which were acted out in various self-defeating ways, (c) found the curriculum demands too stringent for them, or (d) perceived the curriculum to be irrelevant to their needs.

The AET system can also act as a systemic barrier in that there is no integrated system in place at the government level or the AET service provider level that tracks the labour-market outcomes of adults for any significant length of time following completion of a programme, for example, where adults are regarding employment or educational status in 5-10 years after completing a programme.

The majority of undereducated adult learners receiving government funding for training, or financing themselves to take AET programmes, set out to do so to improve their education credentials and/or to enhance their skills for the main purpose of getting a job. This fact is evidenced in a report by Statistics Canada (2009c) which indicates that although the overall rate of participation in education and training in Canada in 2008 for the population aged 25-64 was 43%, the rate for the same cohort in the same year taking job-related adult education or training was 36%. From a theoretical perspective, the statistics quoted above for job-related participation in AET would suggest an apparent emphasis in AET programmes on human capital development. I will explain more fully the theoretical perspective of human capital development in a following section as part of a conceptual basis for understanding the need to enquire whether AET programmes for undereducated adults are meeting a broad range of needs relative to the emphasis on human capital development.

When I began this research study, I perceived the following issues with the AET system in that students reported that (a) accessing information about and securing adequate funding are challenging, (b) information on choosing an appropriate career path that would lead to a positive labour-market outcome is not clear, and (c) finding an AET programme that meets their needs or expectations is difficult. The foregoing issues were what led me to question whether the AET system was meeting the needs of adult learners to the extent that the system may be too highly focused on the aims of human capital development at the expense of broader social and personal aims of education. These issues were fundamental to my motivation to conduct a doctoral research study.

The theoretical framework for this study was located in the contexts of (a) learning theory, (b) motivations to participation in AET, (c) general barriers to participation in AET, (d) structural barriers to participation in AET, and (e) transformative learning in AET. This theoretical framework is reviewed in Chapter Two.

The learners with whom I was most experienced, and most interested in researching, were those who held a secondary school diploma or less as a formal level of education. According to findings from Statistics Canada (2009b), this group of adult learners had the lowest rate of participation in the Canadian AET system. This low rate of participation can be viewed as a significant problem upon which I will elaborate further in this chapter. After defining some key terms in the following section, I will provide background information for this study, outline the study rationale and purpose, state my research questions and assumptions, address my contributions to knowledge and practice in the field of AET, review the methodological approach I used, and then close with a chapter summary.

Terminology

Some of the adult education literature has classified adults as to their level of formal education, such as those with less than a high school level of education, those with a high school level of education, and those with a postsecondary level of education. Myers and de Broucker (2006) defined the least-educated as those individuals without a high school diploma or postsecondary credential and who represent the majority of nonparticipants in AET. The Canadian Council on Learning (2007a) characterized this undereducated group of adults as Canada's most vulnerable group of adults as well as the least understood. Another group at risk is those individuals with only a high school level

of education. As I have targeted both these groups for participation in this study, taking these two groups together, I will refer to them throughout this dissertation collectively as undereducated adult learners.

Terms that have often been used synonymously in the adult education literature are adult learning and adult education and training. In defining adult education and training, Statistics Canada (2009b) defined education as consisting of formal modes of learning having structured learning activities that lead to a credential, such as a diploma, degree, certificate, or licence. It defined training as consisting of non-formal modes of learning having structured learning activities that do not lead to a recognized credential. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD; 2011) defined formal education as those learning activities that are provided in schools, colleges, universities and other formal educational institutions and which provide a progression of full-time education. It defined non-formal education as those learning activities that are organized and sustained and that take place both within and outside educational institutions. Praxis Research & Consulting Inc.(2007) defined formal learning as those learning activities that are structured and that lead to a recognized credential, non-formal learning as those activities that are also structured, but that do not lead to a recognized credential, and informal learning as those activities that are loosely structured, are self-directed, and do not lead to a recognized credential.

For the purposes of this dissertation, when I refer to the adult education and training (AET) system, I refer to education as the formal kind and training as the non-formal kind. What is not included in my use throughout of AET is informal learning as is defined by Praxis and Research Consulting, Inc. (2007) above.

The inquiry paradigm used in this study is constructivism/interpretivism. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) defined the constructivist paradigm as assuming a “relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (p. 24). This naturalistic methodology was described by Guba and Lincoln (2005) as hermeneutical/dialectical in nature. Blackburn (2005) defined hermeneutics as “the method of interpretation first of texts, and secondly of the whole social, historical, and psychological world” (p. 165) and defined dialectic as “the process of reasoning to obtain truth and knowledge on any topic” (p. 99).

In referring in this paper to literature associated with critical theory, I used the term hegemony which, according to Brookfield (2005), refers to “the process by which we learn to embrace enthusiastically a system of beliefs and practices that end up harming us and working to support the interests of others who have power over us” (p. 93).

Another key term that I used in this dissertation is instrumentalist when characterizing the AET system. Robeyns (2006) referred to the human capital model of education as “entirely instrumental; it values education, skills and knowledge only in so far as they contribute (directly or indirectly) to expected economic productivity” (p. 73).

The Problem

The underlying problem in this study is that there is a relatively low participation rate in the Canadian AET system by the group of adults with a high school level of education or less. The overall participation rate in the Canadian AET system of adults aged 25-64 in 2008 was 43% (Statistics Canada, 2009a). Comprising this rate, according

to Statistics Canada, was 34% who engaged in training and 18% who participated in education. This overall participation rate of 43% in the Canadian AET system was compared to the average participation rate of similar cohorts across 18 countries of 36%, according to Eurostat Statistics in Focus (2009). Moreover, this overall participation rate of 43% in the Canadian AET system was compared to the higher participation rates of similar cohorts of 73% for Sweden, 55% for Finland, and 49% for the United Kingdom, according to Eurostat Statistics in Focus.

The problem becomes more apparent when focusing specifically on job-related AET participation rates and levels of formal education. Statistics Canada (2009b) reported that out of the overall participation rate in the Canadian AET system of 43% of Canadians aged 25-64 in 2008, the participation rate for those with less than a high school level of education was 14%, for those with a high school level of education was 25%, and for those with a postsecondary level of education was 44%. Although the participation rate of the undereducated group (less than a high school level of formal education) increased from 8% to 14% between 2002 and 2008, according to Statistics Canada (2009b), this group continues to have the lowest participation rate. In a similar pattern, comparing participation rates in AET and levels of education, the OECD (2011) reported that participation rates for Canada in 2008 for formal and non-formal education were 18% for those with less than an International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 3 (less than upper secondary), 35% for those with an ISCED level 3/4 (upper secondary), and 60% for those with an ISCED level 5/6 (tertiary).

The problem of a low participation rate in the Canadian AET system by undereducated adults is significant when viewed from an instrumentalist perspective

because, according to Becker (1993), “education and training are the most important investments in human capital” (p. 17). Schultz (1961) contended that “such investment in human capital accounts for most of the impressive rise in the real earnings per worker” (p. 1). Therefore, if undereducated adults have a low participation rate in AET programmes, and adult education and training are the most important investments in human capital development which reportedly raises the real earnings per worker, then undereducated adults could face significant personal economic challenges.

Human capital theory proposed that a higher level of formal education leads to improved individual, societal, and economic outcomes (Becker, 1964; Mincer, 1958; Schultz, 1961; Smith, 1776). According to Schultz, “The philosopher-economist Adam Smith boldly included all of the acquired and useful abilities of all of the inhabitants of a country as a part of capital” (p. 2). Becker (2008) defined human capital as a type of capital, apart from tangible forms of capital such as a bank account or shares in a stock, such as education and training that raises earnings, improves health, or adds to a person’s good habits over much of his/her lifetime. This type of capital is called human capital because “people cannot be separated from their knowledge, skills, health, or values in the way they can be separated from their financial and physical assets” (p. 1). Similarly, Schultz (1961) stated, “Any capability produced by human investment becomes a part of the human agent and hence cannot be sold” (p. 8).

The link between education and training and human capital development has evolved. According to the European Association for the Education of Adults (2006), a comparison between the first and second generation of lifelong learning shows the former being “replaced by a narrower interpretation, centring on the needs of [the] economy for

skilled labour with the necessary competence. Lifelong learning thus merged with elements of economic human capital theory” (p. 8). Bills (2004) described this linkage in terms of the ever-rising educational requirements for jobs, high schools becoming more attuned to the world of work, and postsecondary institutions being held accountable for the job placement rates of their graduates. Crocker (2006) suggested that the strong emphasis on accountability and outcomes assessment in education is driven by the need for the education system to achieve the outcomes key to human capital development. Therefore, investment in education and training for adults, according to the OECD (2011), is essential in preparing adults with the skills needed in the labour force.

There have been various effects of the emphasis on human capital development. A major effect is that education has become increasingly commodified and focused on a “market relationship between producer and consumer [in which] knowledge is exchanged on the basis of the performative value it has for the consumer” (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997, p. 14). Hadfield (2003) indicated that adult learners may think of themselves as customers and, accordingly, hold institutions of higher education accountable for providing results for which they have paid. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) emphasized that adult education has responded to a market relationship with training and development initiatives designed to address a wide range of economic needs. This is evident in that the OECD (2006) reported that among most of the countries it surveyed, more than 70% of all formal education and training programmes taken by adults were for the purpose of job-related skill development.

Another effect of the emphasis on human capital development is that the purpose of adult education and training is being questioned. According to Cunningham (2000),

adult educators must decide “whether to locate their practice in civil society or the economic sector” (p. 577). Civil society was defined by Keane (2009) as “a realm of social life–market exchanges, charitable groups, clubs and voluntary associations, independent churches and publishing houses–institutionally separated from territorial state institutions” (p. 1). One of its purposes, according to Keane, is to act “as a guide to formulating a social and political strategy or action program for achieving a predefined or assumed political good” (p. 3). McMurtry (1998) referred to civil society as the “civil commons” (p. 24) and described it as the space where individuals participate in social activities that do not follow the logic of the market. According to McMurtry, this space encompasses language, education, literacy, cultural heritage, and organizations associated with the public sphere.

Human Capital is Related to the Economic Well-Being of Individuals

Bills (2004) declared that of the many stated goals of education, such as enhanced cognitive, emotional, and social development, “None is more central than the belief that formal education is the path to socioeconomic success” (p. 14). Becker (1993) concluded that, “high school and college education in the United States greatly raised a person’s income, even after netting out direct and indirect costs of schooling, and after adjusting for the better family backgrounds and greater abilities of more educated people” (p.17). Similarly, Zhang and Palameta (2006) found that most men and some women having obtained a postsecondary certificate had significant gains in their hourly wage rate and annual earnings with the exception of low-educated women who only realized significant gains in their hourly wage rate.

Myers and de Broucker (2006) expressed concern that the “least-educated individuals are at great risk of being left behind in a post-industrial, knowledge-based economy and are likely to face low wages and a higher likelihood of unemployment over the course of their careers” (p. 3). They found that workers with a Bachelor’s degree earned 129% of the median wage for all educational groups compared to workers with less than a high school level of education who made 81%. Moreover, they reported that the unemployment rate in 2001 varied from 4.2% for those with a Bachelor’s degree, to 5.9% for those with a high school level of education, to 9.7% for those with less than a high school level of education.

Statistics Canada (2009c) noted that while the potential of individuals is strengthened by initial education, people need to acquire higher education and to participate in lifelong learning in order to adapt to changes in the workplace and in society.

Human Capital is Related to the Economic Well-Being of Countries

In addition to evidence that a greater level of human capital contributes favourably to the economic returns to individuals, human capital also has significance to the economic well-being of countries. Becker (1993) purported that there have been “few if any countries that have achieved a sustained period of economic development without having invested substantial amounts in their labour force” (p. 12).

Human capital development is a factor in a country’s global competitiveness, according to the World Economic Forum (2011). It defined competitiveness as the set of institutions, policies, and factors that determine the level of productivity of a country. The level of productivity, in turn, sets the level of prosperity that

can be earned by an economy. The productivity level also determines the rates of return obtained by investments in an economy, which in turn are the fundamental drivers of its growth rates. (p. 4)

The Conference Board of Canada (2011) defined productivity as “a measure of how efficiently goods and services are produced [and is] also the single most important determinant of a country’s per capita income over the longer term” (p. 2). According to The Conference Board of Canada, in 2008, Canada had a negative productivity growth and ranked 12th among the top 17 countries making Canada less competitive on the Global Competitiveness Index. One of the 12 pillars of competitiveness, according to the World Economic Forum (2011), is higher education and training because it will nurture “pools of well-educated workers who are able to adapt rapidly to their changing environment and the evolving needs of the production system” (p. 5).

In addressing the need to develop a greater number of productive workers, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2001) reported that it will focus on preparing new sources of skilled labour, such as Aboriginal Canadians, youth, persons with disabilities, and immigrants to Canada, along with a focus on pursuing universal higher education. This skills agenda, according to Brisbois and Saunders (2005), was established in part in reaction to the results of the International Adult Literacy Survey (1994) which indicated that 42% of Canadian adults had literacy and numeracy levels below those which would be considered acceptable for performing everyday tasks in the home, community, and workplace. Moreover, Gregg (2007) indicated that driving the need for adult education is the fact that Canada has a productivity gap between its rate and those of other top countries in the world.

Critique of Human Capital Theory

The concern about a country's competitiveness is a function of the broader processes of globalization. Globalization is a complex phenomenon, a term which is used today to reflect the process of increasing integration of economies on a worldwide scale particularly through trade and financial flows (Merriam et al., 2007). It is defined by Finger (2005) as "a movement of economic integration, of cultural homogenization, and of technological uniformization" (p. 269).

The phenomenon of globalization has come about under the economic doctrine of thought termed neoliberalism or capitalism. Neoliberalism, according to Harvey (2005), is defined as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (p. 2). Harvey further explained that neoliberalism "holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market" (p. 3). According to Bowles and Gintis (1975), capitalism

forces individuals to sell their labor power to exist. Schooling, occupational training, child rearing, and health care perform dual economic functions: they play an essential, if indirect, role in production; and they are also essential to the perpetuation of the entire economic and social order. (p. 75)

Although schooling and occupational training is central to the Western neo-liberal socioeconomic system, Robeyns (2006) argues that the purpose of educational policy should be to expand people's capabilities and sensibilities as opposed to the narrower

human capital approach which is viewed as economistic, fragmentized, and exclusively instrumentalistic. According to Becker (1993), the phrase human capital is one that is disliked by people who are generally in favour of education, medical care, and the like. They are the ones who fear that the emphasis on the material effects of human capital will detract from its cultural effects. Many studies show, according to Becker, that “education promotes health, reduces smoking, raises the propensity to vote, improves birth control knowledge, and stimulates the appreciation of classical music, literature, and even tennis” (p. 21).

In considering the purposes of adult education and training as being associated with social development or as human capital development, Finger (2005) purported that adult education has lost its social action perspective as he warned, “Adult education practice in the age of globalization increasingly becomes a toolkit for quick fixes by means of tailor-made and individualized short-term, yet lucrative, trainings” (p. 272).

Becker (1993) described an alternative view that education does little to improve productivity and instead emphasizes credentialism—that degrees signify underlying abilities, persistence, and other valuable traits of people. Spence (1973) argued that job seekers and employers use a process of “market signaling” (p. 355). The employer is not sure of an applicant’s productive capabilities before hiring, therefore, relies on signals from the applicant, for example, an education credential, to inform a hiring decision. This phenomenon may lead some students to acquire a credential as a signal to prospective employers that they will be productive employees, therefore, will be offered opportunities in the labour market.

Schultz (1961) reported that because wage differentials among individuals closely correspond to differentials in education, they strongly suggested that one is a consequence of the other. However, despite evidence that individuals with a higher level of education have greater economic returns, Robeyns (2006) stated, “Not everyone has the same rate of return on education. Given the same amount and quality of education, not every child or adult will to the same degree be able to use this education for income-generating activities” (p. 73).

Beyond Human Capital Theory

Apart from human capital, another form of capital espoused by Bourdieu (1986) is that of cultural capital which is also thought to be an outcome of participation in AET. Bourdieu defined cultural capital as the set of resources a person has accumulated over his/her lifetime in relation to knowledge, skills, and education which “is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital” (p. 47) or, in other words, can give a person a higher status in society. Bourdieu critiqued human capital in that it “does not move beyond economism” (p. 48).

Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada (2001) noted that by paying attention to the needs of those at risk for economic and social marginalization, to the quality of Canada’s adult learning system, and to the participation rates in formal learning, we will be better able to meet a broad range of economic, social, and cultural goals. Statistics Canada (2009b) also indicated a need to more “fully explore the motivations of Canadian adults for engaging in education and training activities, barriers to participation and the reasons why certain groups are underrepresented in such learning activities” (p. 5).

Rationale for the Study

As evidenced by Statistics Canada (2009b), the Canadian adult education and training (AET) system has a low participation rate not only for undereducated adults who have less than a high school level of education, but also for adults who have a high school level of education. Taking these two groups together as the undereducated group of adults, this poses a significant problem in that participation in AET is related to greater human capital development which is purported theoretically and empirically to lead to greater economic returns for individuals and for countries. Accordingly, the rationale for conducting this research study was to examine whether or not AET programmes are meeting the needs of undereducated adults beyond a narrow focus on an instrumental approach associated with human capital development.

The rationale for conducting this study with a phenomenographic approach is that the findings would contribute a different quality of information to the existing literature on adult learner motivations, barriers, needs, and values which has focused primarily on survey research. MacKeracher, Stuart, and Potter (2006) stated:

The survey methods typically used to identify barriers do not appear to be providing the quality of information needed to make decisions about how learning opportunities should be designed and delivered....The use of qualitative research methods, critical inquiry, and participatory inquiry would provide a quality of information that does not yet exist. (p. 24)

Purpose of the Study

Given that the rationale of this study was to examine whether or not AET programmes are meeting the needs of undereducated adults beyond a narrow focus on an

instrumental approach associated with human capital development, the purpose of this study was to explore the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of participation in adult education and training programmes offered by publicly funded school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

Research Questions

The central research question that I posed for this inquiry was: What were the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of participation in adult education and training (AET) programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate?

The secondary research questions that I posed to narrow the central research question were:

1. What were the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of motivations for and barriers to AET programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate?
2. What were the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of their needs being met or needs not being met in AET programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate?
3. What were the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of their academic growth and personal growth in AET programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate?

4. What were the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of the value they placed on their participation in and the reasons why others may not participate in AET programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate?
5. What were the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of changes in their perceptions of self and in their understanding of AET programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate?

I provide in Figure 1, a graphic organizer summarizing these research questions.

Scope and Limitations

This study was limited to 10 participants who were undereducated adults (i.e., those with a high school level of formal education or less) and 1 participant who had a Bachelor's level of education, but who had not utilized her degree in the 10 years since earning it. In order to avoid collecting an unwieldy amount of data, 11 participants seemed like a manageable number upon which to collect interview data and conduct a qualitative analysis and which would be consistent with phenomenographic research.

Although AET programmes are offered at many types of service providers in Canada, such as publicly funded school boards or their arms-length affiliate, colleges, universities, private companies, and not-for-profit organizations, I drew the participants solely from publicly funded school boards or their arms-length affiliate in the province of Ontario. According to Belgrave (2011), an arms-length affiliate is defined as a not-for-profit corporation set up to run arm's length from a school board—operating with its own



Figure 1. Research questions related to the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of participation in adult education and training (AET) programmes offered by Ontario publicly funded school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

board of directors and staff—with any financial surpluses flowing back to the school board to support its operations. I chose to limit this study to these service providers in Ontario because, having worked in the adult learning environment in Ontario, I was more familiar with these service providers and the typical services provided by them. This was also the group of adult learners with whom I had worked and had witnessed both their successes and challenges. Having this contextual professional background, I believed, would help me more effectively put into context participants' reported experiences of participating in these AET programmes. At the risk of potential bias, I found that my experience with AET programmes was very helpful in allowing me to probe responses of the participants to the interview questions to achieve a degree of shared meaning about the topic under discussion. For example, when a given participant was unable to recall the name of the funding he/she was receiving, I was able to list the funding agencies from which the participant was then able to verify the information being given.

The 11 participants were drawn from seven different AET programmes offered by four separate service providers spread throughout three main geographic areas of the province of Ontario. Although I had planned to draw one service provider from each of four geographic regions of Ontario, I was successful at drawing from Southern, Central, Eastern, and Northern Ontario, but not at drawing from a Western Ontario location. I was unable to draw a sample from a Western Ontario location because there were no AET sites within a school board jurisdiction that responded to a call for participation in this research study. The timing of the call in the late Spring for entry to the research site in the summer months of July and August was a deterrent.

I carried out the data collection for this study during June and July 2009. I chose this timeframe to capture adult learners who were engaged in their AET programmes at various stages of their programme duration. Some were in the midst of a summer programme for upgrading high school credits and some were midway or nearing the completion of their longer-term AET programme. This timeframe allowed me to conduct an initial interview with each participant and a second interview approximately four weeks later not only to build rapport with participants, but also to have participants reflect on their daily experiences in the interim period between interviews.

Research findings from scientific studies are considered not to be generalized to the population, according to Creswell (2005), if the sampling technique was not random, if the sample size was too small to be considered representative of the population, if extraneous factors in the research study were not controlled, and if the number of different research settings was narrow. Applying these criteria of external validity to this qualitative study would render the findings in this study inappropriate to be generalized to the population and, hence, would be considered a limitation of this study. Since the research settings in this study were limited to AET sites with programmes operating during the summer months in Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate, I consider this also to be a limitation of this study in that the findings would not be applicable to the broader spectrum of adult learners in other AET programmes and types of institutions.

It may be considered a limitation of this study also, that coder reliability and dialogic reliability checks, as described by Kvale (1996), were not employed. In the former, two researchers are used to independently code the transcripts and compare

categories; and in the latter, these researchers discuss and critique the data and each other's interpretive hypotheses looking for agreement. As I was the principal and only investigator in this study, these forms of reliability check were not employed. Although these two types of reliability check, according to Kvale, may be seen as an ideal approach in qualitative analysis, Akerlind (2005) noted that coder and dialogic reliability checks are used in phenomenographic analysis to varying degrees of popularity and are not uniformly employed.

Substantive Assumptions of the Researcher

As the researcher in this investigation, it is important that I identify my professional experiences, biases, and positioning related to the research that I conducted. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) indicated that biases and expectations of the researcher need to be addressed in the dissertation in order to give the reader a shared lens with the researcher. Similarly, Maynard (2000) purported that researchers need to position themselves in relation to why they care about the topic under investigation, what assumptions they have about how adults learn, and how their values influence what they hear, observe, and retain.

In carrying out this research study, I remained aware that my understanding of AET was to be taken into account. I did this by (a) actively listening to the participants to ensure I understood the meaning of their responses, (b) refraining from leading when probing the research questions, (c) avoiding evaluating participants' comments, and (d) representing their verbatim comments in the findings whether I thought they were right or wrong.

Assumptions about the Educational Context

Prior to conducting this research study, my professional position had been that of a programme co-ordinator for an adult and continuing education department in a publicly funded school board in the province in Ontario. In recognition of a potential bias, I attempted throughout this research study to maintain as neutral a position as possible to mitigate any natural bias I would have, for example, my familiarity with the educational contexts for adults typically found in publicly funded school boards in Ontario and my understandings of typical groups of learners who access these programmes. In an attempt to minimize an inherent bias regarding the educational context, I purposely refrained from using my professional site as one of the four participating research sites.

One of the biases I had was an assumption that, for the most part, the AET system was providing what was needed to undereducated learners. I say, “for the most part” because I thought that these were good opportunities being made to learners and if only the learners would take the initiative to access and complete the programmes, they could achieve success in terms of their goal to enter or re-enter the labour market.

A further inherent bias was my previous involvement with a provincial-level professional association for adult and continuing education school board administrators with which I had been an active member and contributed extensively as an advocate for the Ontario adult education and training system. I suspected that in carrying out this research study, there could be critical themes identified that would place me in between being an advocate for adult learners and an analyst of the AET system. I have developed the recognition and a comfort level that in order to be an effective advocate for adult learners, it is important that I think critically about the AET system in implementing

directives of the Ontario Ministry of Education as well as other provincial ministries and federal government agencies. Accordingly, I have made every effort to represent the experiences of the study participants as they reported them in as complete and accurate a fashion as possible to gain better insight into the experiences that the adult learner participants have had in the Ontario AET system.

Assumptions about How Adults Learn

Throughout my professional career as an adult educator and programme developer, under the jurisdiction of an Ontario school board, I have made the assumptions that the learners in these programmes are more successful when the curriculum is meaningful in that the curriculum is relevant, when they are not stringently evaluated by comprehensive exams so that fearfulness is reduced, when there is flexibility in how they complete assignments in order to work according to their learning style, and when there is sensitivity around their needs for when assignments are to be completed in order to work around competing life demands. I also agree with Knowles' (1980) assumption that learners are more successful when they have a problem to solve or a need to satisfy, such as finding a new job or exploring their identity.

Assumptions about the Values of the Undereducated Adult Learner

An assumption that I held about undereducated adult learners is that they should be sufficiently motivated to participate in and complete the adult learning programmes that they had chosen and that had been designed to lead them to success in the labour market. Embedded in this assumption was an inherent middle-class bias that assumes one should be motivated in this manner and that all one has to do to be successful in the labour market is to meet the curriculum expectations, follow the rules set out by the

educational institution to gain the credential, and apply oneself in the job search process. According to the principles of andragogy, espoused by Knowles (1980), adult learners are known to be self-directed or motivated to work toward greater self-direction. As I have witnessed many adult learners who have not been self-directed and have needed a fair amount of direction or more assertive measures (e.g., deduction of marks) in order to complete a programme of study, I do not agree entirely with Knowles' assumption that adult learners are motivated toward self-direction.

Having recognized that there could be significant socialization differences regarding education between different socioeconomic classes, I made an assumption in this research study that it may be possible for undereducated adult learners to change their opinions, beliefs, or values about themselves in a learning context or about the AET system as a result of participating in an AET programme. Given this possibility for changes in perspective, I included a research sub-question related to the notion of change in oneself or in one's understanding of the AET system and, accordingly, have included a literature review of the theory of transformative learning. I did not assume that all or any of the participants would be transformed by their experiences in the AET programme within which they were participating—only that it was a possibility.

Contributions to Knowledge and Practice

MacKeracher et al. (2006) noted the prevalence of survey-based research and identified a gap of a different quality of information needed to make decisions about how learning should be designed and delivered. Crowther (2000), Willis (1977), and McLaren (1989) address the importance of taking learners' lived experiences and voices into account when considering their needs for learning. Hart et al. (2002) found that

there was a gap in the adult education literature addressing the particular concerns of marginalized groups and adult learners' voices were not being heard. The OECD (2003) also recognized a gap in knowledge about the psychological needs of adult learners.

This study of undereducated adult learners, unlike many former studies that have taken a survey-based approach, provided thick description of learners' lived experiences and found that learners have a multitude of motivations, barriers, needs, and values which are expressed in qualitatively different voices. Undereducated adult learner experiences could be understood through each voice in and of itself, but it is more likely that these voices combine in a multitude of ways to create very complex lives for undereducated adult learners within which they must make decisions about AET.

The findings in this research study will contribute more qualitative data to a significant body of existing research on adult learner motivations, barriers, growth, needs, values, and perceptions as they relate to participation in AET. This is valuable in that according to MacKeracher et al. (2006) the existing body of AET literature contains a high concentration of survey-based research on these topics that has been analyzed within a positivistic research paradigm.

As a result of using a phenomenographic analysis in this study, the findings that there were four qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adult learners reported their experiences of participation in an AET programme will provide insights and also add to the existing literature specifically in relation to the undereducated group of adults. As the study sample was comprised of various members who were older, had a disability, were English language learners, and were low-wage earners, insights on behalf of these groups would be valuable, according to Hart et al. (2002).

Another contribution of my findings to the field of AET is that new areas for further inquiry have been proposed related to the qualitatively different ways undereducated adult learners reported their experiences of participation in AET. In Chapter Five, I discuss these potential areas for further inquiry.

Methodological Approach

The aim of this study was not to prove or disprove a particular hypothesis nor was it to derive a theory which may be used for predictive purposes, but to explore the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of participation in AET programmes. In order to achieve this, the theoretical perspective I assumed was that of constructivism/interpretivism (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Within this theoretical research paradigm, I chose to take a qualitative methodological approach that would support the purpose of this study which was that of phenomenography. According to Marton (1981), a phenomenographic approach would (a) represent learners' experiences; (b) provide a limited number of qualitatively different ways of experiencing; (c) state what can be said about the learners' perceptions, experiences, and conceptualizations; and (d) represent the learners' pre-reflective thought which pertains to the taken-for-granted world of everyday existence, or in other words, what was thought to be lived in terms of the phenomenon of participation in AET.

This phenomenographic approach required me to combine the participant descriptions of their lived experiences of the phenomenon of participation in AET programmes from which I derived a limited number of qualitatively different ways of how undereducated adult learners described their lived experiences. I give a more thorough description of phenomenography as a methodology in Chapter Three where I

also contrast phenomenographic and phenomenological research methodologies often confused with each other.

The research design, although consisting of a phenomenographic approach, also met the criteria for a case study as I treated the entire sample of 11 participants as a bounded system by virtue of the participants' common distinguishing factor as members of the undereducated group of adults. Accordingly, this bounded system constituted the unit of analysis in this study. Merriam (1998) described a case study as an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single unit or bounded system" (p. 12). As a hybrid of both a phenomenographic and case study methodology, I have used a phenomenographic case study design for this research inquiry.

Summary of Chapter One

In Chapter One, I offered a description of my context as a professional in the field of adult education and training (AET) and its relationship to this research study. I discussed the migration of AET funding models from project-based funding to primarily client-centred models. I showed that with such an emphasis on successful labour-market outcomes, the Canadian AET system seems to be highly focused on instrumentalist goals. I questioned whether the AET system was meeting the expectations or broader needs of undereducated adult learners based on observations of and comments from learners who had been in or who had tried to access the AET system.

The theoretical framework of this study was located in (a) learning theory, (b) motivations for participation in AET, (c) general barriers to participation in AET, (d) structural barriers to participation in AET, and (d) transformative learning in AET followed by definitions of key terms used throughout this dissertation.

I identified the problem underpinning this study to be a relatively low participation rate in the Canadian AET system by the group of adults with a high school level of education or less and termed this group the undereducated group of adults. The low participation rate in the Canadian AET system by the undereducated group is significant because formal and non-formal AET programmes are considered a means to develop greater human capital which is linked to a higher level of economic outcomes for individuals and to countries.

I outlined in more detail how human capital is linked to the economic well-being of individuals and to Canada followed by a critique of human capital theory and how it is positioned in the context of globalization being a function of a neo-liberal ideology. I then identified potential issues related to a narrow focus on human capital theory as it relates to AET and expanded into a definition of cultural capital.

I stated that the rationale for conducting this research study was to examine whether or not AET programmes are meeting the needs of undereducated adults beyond a narrow focus on an instrumental approach associated with human capital development. In light of the rationale, I explained that the purpose of this study was to explore the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of participation in adult education and training programmes offered by publicly funded school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

I then stated the central research question in this study as enquiring into the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adult learners reported their experiences of participation in adult education and training (AET) programmes, offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate. This central question was

followed by 5 research sub-questions that related to motivations and barriers, needs, growth, values, and perceptions.

I described the scope of this study as comprising 10 undereducated adults and 1 adult possessing a higher level of education. I described that the sample was drawn from publicly funded school boards or their arms-length affiliate in the province of Ontario which comprised 11 participants drawn from seven different AET programmes offered by four separate service providers spread throughout the province of Ontario. I noted that I carried out the data collection for this study during June and July 2009.

I then presented my assumptions as the researcher about the educational context of the AET system, how adults learn, and the values of undereducated adult learners followed by expected contributions to knowledge and practice of this research study. I outlined the contributions of my findings to theory and practice in the field of AET being that of a different quality of information to the existing AET literature which is primarily survey-based, that of insights into the reported experiences of participation in AET of various marginalized groups, and that of insights into areas for further inquiry.

I concluded this chapter with a description of the methodology I used in this study summarizing the methodological research paradigm, the phenomenographic research approach, and the research design.

In Chapter Two, I review the AET literature which provides the theoretical and research framework to support the context of this study. The theoretical foundations and research in Chapter Two include: (a) learning theory, (b) motivations for participation in AET, (c) general barriers to participation in AET, (d) structural barriers to participation in AET, and (e) transformative learning in AET.

In Chapter Three, the qualitative methodology used in this study is explained by describing the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, a phenomenographic approach, the differences between phenomenography and phenomenology, and how the design of the study met the criteria for a phenomenographic case study. I describe the purposive sampling technique used followed by a review of how the study met the research ethics requirements. The steps in obtaining access to research participants are outlined. In the data collection section, I describe the pilot interviews, the initial, ongoing, and final data collection phases. In the data analysis section, I outline the phenomenographic approach to data analysis and describe how the issues of validity and reliability of my research were addressed.

In Chapter Four, I review again the purpose of this research study and present the participant demographic findings, the phenomenographic findings as thick description of participant reports, and the researcher reflexive findings.

In Chapter Five, I discuss the implications of my findings to learning theory, human capital theory, theory in complementary fields, research in AET, and areas for further inquiry. I conclude this dissertation by offering a model of how to look at the Canadian AET system from the perspective of meeting the broader needs of the undereducated adult learner while continuing to take into consideration the emphasis on the instrumentalist approach of the AET system.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I present the theoretical and research framework within which this study is situated. The review consists of literature related to (a) learning theory, (b) motivations for participation in AET, (c) general barriers to participation in AET, (d) structural barriers to participation in AET, and (e) transformative learning in AET. I then conclude this chapter with a critical analysis of the AET literature and an identification of knowledge gaps in the field of AET.

Learning Theory

In a review of learning theory and models, Merriam et al. (2007) concluded, “Just as there is no single theory that explains human learning in general, no single theory of adult learning has emerged to unify the field. Rather, there are a number of theories, models, and frameworks, each of which attempts to capture some aspect of adult learning” (p. 103).

Dewey (1938), an influential American philosopher and educational theorist, posited that there is a necessary relation between actual experience and education. He argued for a new or progressive education for youth that would position subject matter within experience as opposed to the traditional education of organized subject matter being transmitted to the learner by the school. Dewey espoused the principle that “education in order to accomplish its ends both for the individual learner and for society must be based upon experience—which is always the actual life-experience of some individual” (p. 89). Two major concepts of Dewey’s theory of experience are continuity and interaction. Continuity pertains to the notion that all experiences lead to and shape subsequent experiences. The concept of interaction pertains to the relationship between

the learner and what is learned. Based on these two concepts, the quality of experiences that learners have is crucial to whether the experiences are educative, which would move the learner along a continuum of growth to further learning experiences, or are mis-educative, which would serve to distort or arrest growth along this continuum.

Dewey's (1938) theory of experience and its relation to education for youth became the foundation upon which early theories of adult learning were built. Lindeman was an American social worker and philosopher whose work was inspired by Dewey. In conceptualizing the meaning of adult education, Lindeman (1989) purported that conventional education requires the student to adjust himself/herself to an established curriculum, but adult education builds the curriculum around the needs and interests of the student. As in keeping with Dewey, Lindeman stated, "The resource of highest value in adult education is the *learner's experience*" (p. 6). Adult learners, according to Lindeman, want from their learning experience "intelligence, power, self-expression, freedom, creativity, appreciation, enjoyment, and fellowship" (p. 9). Lindeman recognized that there are obvious advantages to skill development in an effort to avoid being excluded from having effectiveness in the modern world; however, stated, "If life is to become merely adjustment *to* the compulsions of science, specialism and industry, the worth of human personality and experience will cumulatively deteriorate" (p. 128).

Knowles (1980), a European adult educator and major proponent of the concept of andragogy defined it as "the art and science of helping adults learn, in contrast to pedagogy as the art and science of teaching children" (p. 43). Knowles recognized that the premise of pedagogy was the transmittal of knowledge and skills thought to be needed in society over the lifespan of individuals. However, the increasing pace of social

change made the knowledge and skills gained obsolete within a matter of years.

Accordingly, Knowles concluded that education must become a lifelong process of continuing inquiry and stated, “So the most important learning of all—for both children and adults—is learning how to learn, the skills of self-directed inquiry” (p. 41). Although Knowles originally purported that andragogy was applicable to adults, he broadened his thinking to accept that “andragogy is simply another model of assumptions about learners to be used alongside the pedagogical model of assumptions, thereby providing two alternative models for testing out the assumptions as to their *fit* with particular situations” (p. 43). The main assumptions of the andragogical model and their corresponding implications for practice, purported by Knowles (1980), are (a) adults have a need to move from dependency to self-directedness, therefore, teachers have a responsibility to encourage this movement; (b) people attach greater meaning to learning they gain by experience than those they acquire passively; therefore, the primary techniques in education should be experiential; (c) people become ready to learn when they have a need to learn in order to cope with life problems; therefore, learning programs should be organized around life-application; and (d) learners see education as helping them to achieve competence to achieve their potential; therefore, learning should be organized around competency development.

Among growing criticisms that andragogy did not pay enough attention to the sociological aspects of adult education, according to Merriam et al. (2007), Jarvis (2004) situated the individual learner in the learner’s social context. Massive changes, according to Jarvis, have taken place in the field of lifelong learning as a result of the effects of globalization. This socioeconomic phenomenon, of manufacturing and capital being

transferred around the world, has significant political and cultural implications for education. Jarvis referred to how we have become or are expected to be more instrumental about education to meet the demands of a global marketplace and how the effects on lifelong learning, often to its detriment, have been to shift power and increase inequality and social exclusion. Jarvis stated, “Education has become a commodity to be sold on the learning market rather than a state provision for the good of its population” (p. 5).

Further related theory and research are reviewed in the following sections on: (a) motivations for participation in AET, (b) general barriers to participation in AET, (c) structural barriers to participation in AET, and (d) transformative learning in AET.

Motivations for Participation in AET

This section reviews theory and research specific to the topic of motivations for participation in AET. In a scientific inquiry with a focus on the internal processes of adult learning, Houle (1961) studied a sample of 22 adults who were enrolled in a variety of continuing education programmes in Chicago. Through in-depth interviews, he enquired about the history of the learners’ educational experiences, how they came to be in continuing education programmes, and how they saw themselves as learners. Houle developed a typology of adult learner motivation which classified adult learners as: (a) goal-oriented—those who want to achieve a specific goal, (b) activity-oriented—those who derive enjoyment from participating in the activity itself, and (c) learning-oriented—those who are motivated to acquire knowledge for its own sake. As this was a pilot study and there was no attempt to use a random sample, the claims were not generalized to the broader population of adult learners.

Boshier (1971) later developed the 48-item Education Participation Scale to measure adult learner motivations and to test the typology developed by Houle (1961). The scale was administered to 233 randomly selected adult education participants from three educational institutions in New Zealand. Through factor analysis, a model of adult education participation was developed which proposed that participants are either *being* or deficiency motivated and that motives are more complex than those identified by Houle. Boshier (1991) further examined the construct validity and reliability of the original Education Participation Scale. Analysis of the responses to the survey items from 845 subjects living in North America and Asia resulted in the finding that the New Education Participation Scale was psychometrically sound. The results indicated seven factors of adult learner motivation including (a) communication improvement, (b) social contact, (c) educational preparation, (d) professional advancement, (e) family togetherness, (f) social stimulation, and (g) cognitive interest.

Fujita-Starck (1996) surveyed 1,142 students participating in different curricular programmes at the University of Hawaii and confirmed Boshier's (1991) seven-factor typology of adult learner motivation. Results revealed a distinctive set of student characteristics and reasons for adult learner participation between curricular groups.

Gorard and Selwyn (2005) explored ways in which the motivations for lifelong learning vary over time and place. Data analyzed from 1,001 home-based interviews with adults living in the United Kingdom indicated that motivation for further study after initial compulsory schooling was related to key variables, such as age, ethnicity, sex, family background, and initial schooling. Gorard and Selwyn indicated that actual patterns of participation are predictable from regression analysis. They concluded that

adult learners will be more motivated if they have not developed a learner identity that is inimical to further study.

General Barriers to Participation in AET

This section reviews key research on general barriers to participation in adult learning between 1981 and 2006. This section will then be followed by a section specifically to review structural barriers to participation in AET.

Cross (1981) reviewed adult learner characteristics through a synthesis of research about motivations and deterrents to adult learning. Three classifications of deterrents were determined to be (a) situational—conflicting role responsibilities, inadequate personal resources, level of support from others, and accessibility to the learning site; (b) institutional—inaccessibility of information, required credentials for admission, difficult registration procedures, and inconvenient scheduling of learning opportunities; and (c) dispositional—level of self-confidence, negative attitudes about the benefits of learning, the self, and administrators and instructors, negative experiences of prior learning, feelings of isolation while learning, and poor health and fitness.

Schlossberg (1984), based at an American university, developed a framework to facilitate the understanding of adult life transitions which was comprised of variables characterizing (a) the transition, (b) the individual, and (c) the environment. In relation to learning opportunities for adult students, Schlossberg posited that barriers change as a learner enters and moves through a learning opportunity and that it is important to understand how learners make the transitions from moving in, moving through, and moving out of a learning opportunity and how to assist them through the application of counselling processes and techniques.

Darkenwald and Valentine (1985) conducted a study of the general public to identify the deterrents to participating in organized adult education. An instrument modeled on the original Deterrents to Participation Scale (DPS) and mailed to 2,000 randomly selected households in New Jersey resulted in the return of 215 usable questionnaires. A principal components analysis found six factors of deterrence to be (a) lack of confidence, (b) lack of course relevance, (c) time constraints, (d) low personal priority, (e) cost, and (f) personal problems.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) examined the ways of knowing of 135 adult women in the United States from varied socioeconomic, ethnic, and educational backgrounds across varied contexts including participation in the formal higher-education system and outside the system. Through analysis of interview data, these ways of knowing or voices for women were identified as (a) silence—women who feel disconnected from knowledge; (b) received knowledge—women who perceive truths to come from authorities; (c) subjective knowledge—women who consider their subjective thoughts, feelings, and experiences to be truths; (d) procedural knowledge—women who recognize there are multiple sources of truths; and (e) constructed knowledge—women who recognize that knowledge, knowing, and the knower are interrelated. Belenky et al. found that the participants with a lack of voice felt profoundly isolated and lacked confidence in how they make and share meaning.

Fagan (1991) reviewed literature on learner participation in adult literacy and basic education programmes and conceptualized three factors that influence participation which are (a) learner-inherent factors—including self-evaluation, goals, and capabilities; (b) life factors—including information, transitions, and barriers; and (c) program

factors—including organization, content, procedures, and personnel. Fagan examined how the three sets of factors interact and concluded that programmes must provide for interaction between the instructor and the student, learning activities must be related to the learners' goals, and that students must be involved in their learning.

Hall and Donaldson (1997) explored the social and personal dynamics that deter underserved women from participating in formal adult education in a study of 13 non-participating women in a mid-western town in the United States who had not earned a high school diploma. Participants were allowed to tell their story through interview questions loosely following the DPS (1988). A grounded theory analysis resulted in the Life Influence Model of Participation which incorporates the integration of (a) pre-adulthood factors—including school-related issues of parents and self; (b) patterns of nonsupport in adulthood—including lack of support from parents growing up and in adult relationships; (c) conventional deterrents—including multiple conventional deterrents within the life context; and (d) lack of voice in adulthood—including self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-expression. Hall and Donaldson recommended that a greater number of issues and the relationships among them need to be explored.

Long and Taylor (2002) conducted the first stage of a two-stage Canadian study with 44 individuals via telephone to determine the reasons for nonparticipation in adult literacy and upgrading programmes. In the second stage of the study, Hart, Long, Breslauer, and Slosser (2002) administered a telephone survey to a sample of 866 individuals who had not completed their secondary education. Findings indicated that a variety of life context factors and highly developed coping strategies made programmes appear irrelevant to their needs. For example, family responsibilities and lack of interest

were two major deterrents to participation. Other reasons cited were lack of money, paid-employment conflicts, distance issues, programme length, level of difficulty, pace, relevance, and their own ability to succeed. Hart et al. identified a hierarchy of concerns which included socioeconomic/circumstantial and programme/policy-related concerns which were more highly ranked than cognitive/emotive concerns. The authors concluded that (a) strategies to attract learners must be multi-faceted and must address both structural and perceptual factors, (b) perceptual factors should focus on dislodging inaccurate assumptions about literacy and upgrading programmes, and (c) outreach strategies should use positive images and include an appeal to people's strengths.

MacKeracher et al. (2006) reported that over the last 50 years, the concept of barriers to participation in learning opportunities has been prevalent in the adult education literature. They surveyed the literature and summarized the major types of barriers as (a) situational—comprising broad circumstantial conditions, (b) institutional—consisting of how institutions offer learning opportunities, (c) dispositional or attitudinal—relating to adult learners' perceptions, (d) academic—pertaining to academic skills that aid in learning, (e) pedagogical—being a lack of understanding on the part of instructors, and (f) employment training—where employers typically only offer training in the workplace to well-educated employees in high wage jobs. MacKeracher et al. noted that of all the major classifications of barriers, it is the dispositional/attitudinal group, relating to psychological factors, that is especially problematic because these factors are hard to document and are often thought of as being the result of some inadequacy on the part of the learner. Examples of dispositional/attitudinal barriers cited in the literature, according to MacKeracher et al., are (a) self-esteem; (b) negative sense

of self-as-learner; and (c) lack of intelligence, energy, and/or interest. They recommended further potential lines of enquiry, for example, conducting a critical and participatory inquiry into how adults of low participatory groups conceptualize barriers to their potential participation in AET and qualitative interviews with adult learners to identify the types of barriers they experience in formal and informal AET.

The following section reviews theory and research on structural barriers to participation in AET.

Structural Barriers to Participation in AET

Bringing a different perspective to the issues surrounding participation and nonparticipation in AET, some theorists and researchers (Brookfield, 2005; Crowther, 2000; Freire, 1973, 1985; Lindeman, 1989; McLaren, 1989; Rubenson, 1998) focus on macro-level structural factors. Critical analyses of these factors revealed that barriers to participation in AET exist which may not be overtly recognized by learners and which act as deterrents to participation, causes of failure, or expressions of resistance.

Freire (1973) in his work with Brazilian adult learners argued that low levels of adult literacy are the direct result of oppressive social structures and unequal power relations that are exercised in society. What is needed in schools, according to Freire, is the provision of individual and collective opportunities for student reflection and action. Educators should draw upon the cultural capital of their students in order to encourage those who are marginalized in society to see the world in not only the immediate, but also the wider context. The purpose of learners engaging in critical analysis is to have learners decode texts, institutions, social practices, and cultural forms to reveal their

ideological underpinnings (Freire, 1985). By empowering individuals to critically analyze oppressive social structures, Freire claimed they could be transformed.

Jarvis (1985), out of his work with students at the University of Surrey in the United Kingdom, purported that a middle-class bias can be found in the organization and presentation of knowledge in AET programmes. This occurs because the language and content inherent in the knowledge that is presented is typically that of the middle class. This language and content in knowledge promotes the values of the dominant culture and, hence, continues to reproduce it. Jarvis espoused that adult education functions to maintain the status quo rather than bring about change in inequities.

Lindeman (1989), referring to the adult educational system in the United States, purported, “The system derives its chief momentum from subject-teaching—a method which is compatible with a perverted and shallow pragmatism and profitable to an industrial order which requires technicians, not educated men and women” (p. 113). Lindeman concluded that the purpose of adult education is “to give meaning to the categories of experiences, not to classifications of knowledge” (p. 123). If the discourse on participation is largely constructed by adult educators and policymakers, student voice will not be taken into consideration.

McLaren (1989) espoused a critical pedagogy for youth which examined American public schools in the context of the social and political framework of the dominant society. Within this perspective, students fail in part because the dominant culture cannot “understand the classroom behavior and performance of economically disadvantaged and minority students without understanding their history as oppressed groups, their cultural frames of reference, and the everyday social practices” (p. 211).

McLaren stated, “Students actively contest the hegemony of the dominant culture through resistance” (p. 214).

Blaming failure on individual traits, such as lack of motivation, low self-concept, laziness, apathy, or intellectual inferiority, amounts to psychologizing student failure, according to McLaren (1989). “If we understand that the active refusal ... is in fact class, culture, or race specific forms of resistance, then we can understand that school failure is more than just individual deficiencies on the part of students” (McLaren, 1989, p. 221). Schools, rather than trying to correct the cultural deficits and to motivate students who are actively resisting, should be “considering structural changes in the wider society, changes in school policy, negative teacher feeling, or curriculum implementation that might be exacerbating the problems” (p. 225).

Rubenson (1998) analyzed international literacy survey data to examine adults’ readiness to learn and found that readiness to learn was a function of structural, institutional, and individual consciousness. According to Rubenson, much of the learning environment is structured by the middle class so the ones most likely to take part in the learning opportunities are those who have been socialized to value and acquire the skills of the middle class. Rubenson concluded that a system of lifelong learning whose

point of departure is the notion that adults are completely self-directed individuals in possession of the tools necessary to seize on adult education opportunities then that strategy is doomed to widen, not narrow, the educational and cultural gaps in society. (p. 8)

Policymakers may believe that they are creating and supporting equal access to education, but the reality clearly shows unequal participation in formal AET, according to Rubenson.

Crowther (2000) conceptualized nonparticipation as an act of resistance to the social order as opposed to viewing it as a factor beyond one's control. In regard to the failure of many adults to respond to AET being made available, Crowther indicated there is an assumption that people are apathetic and are not ambitious. However, redefining nonparticipation as a form of resistance may help to encourage a rethinking of the purpose of adult education and where it occurs. Crowther concluded, "We need to locate participation in historically and contextually specific ways" (p. 490).

Brookfield (2005) located adult learning in a critical framework which emphasizes that the purpose of adult education should be to have adults recognize how their everyday thoughts and actions are functions of the dominant ideology which are embedded in our institutions. Adult learning, according to Brookfield, is seen as comprising a series of tasks including: (a) challenging ideology, (b) unmasking power, (c) contesting hegemony, (d) overcoming alienation, (e) pursuing liberation, (f) reclaiming reason, and (g) practising democracy. These critical learning tasks will be outlined briefly as follows with reference to how these tasks may represent barriers to adult learning that may be inherent in the social order, but that may be repressed from the conscious minds of learners.

Ideology critique is a term used by The Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory and refers to "helping people come to an awareness of how capitalism shapes social relations and imposes—often without our knowledge—belief systems and assumptions

(that is, ideologies) that justify and maintain economic and political inequity”

(Brookfield, 2005, p. 13). Adult learners may feel frustrated if they do not recognize that their needs are being manufactured by marketing or political forces. They should be taught to recognize how capitalism drives their choices for AET and how it affects their economic circumstances.

A related concept, hegemony, is a term that Brookfield (2005) addressed which “describes the way that people learn to accept as natural and in their own best interest an unjust social order” (p. 43). A potential barrier to adult learning is that adults can be subject to inequitable power relations, but they may not know how to defend against them. Brookfield stated, “We are alienated, in Marx’s view, when we work and live in ways that estrange us from who we really are” (p. 52).

Learning liberation is another critical learning task, according to Brookfield (2005), which suggests that “attention should be paid to the possibility of individual liberation detached from the collectivity” (p. 54). Some learners have lost their voice among stronger voices that define the agenda in a collective learning environment.

A further critical learning task, espoused by Brookfield (2005), is to “*reclaim reason* as something to be applied in all spheres of life, particularly in deciding values by which we should live” (p. 56). Learners can experience barriers to adult learning if they do not know how to examine the sets of unquestioned assumptions that direct their reasoning.

One other learning task that Brookfield (2005) described is practising democracy. He stated, “The idea that its [adult education] practitioners should work to make their practice increasingly democratic is one of the most powerful” (p. 61). A potential barrier

related to a democratic process in an adult learning environment is that learners may have to deal with decisions that are contrary to those with which they personally would not have agreed. This would pertain to a learning environment where there is an autocratic teaching style which would not allow for much input from learners on the planning of the curriculum or the learning goals.

Among these critical tasks, espoused by Brookfield (2005) an outcome of critical reflection, according to Mezirow (2000), is that an individual could transform one's meaning perspective. The following section describes the theory of transformative learning.

Transformative Learning in AET

MacKeracher et al. (2006), in commenting on lucrative fields that might be considered complementary to the literature on adult education, identified transformative learning as having the potential to contribute to knowledge that would be of value to adult learners. One of the research sub-questions in this study is aimed at addressing the notion of change in undereducated adult learners' values, beliefs, and attitudes about themselves and about the AET system as a function of participation in the AET system. Accordingly, I will briefly review the literature on transformative learning.

Transformative learning was a phenomenon observed and identified by Mezirow and Marsick (1978) while teaching a college re-entry programme for socioeconomically marginalized women. Mezirow (2000) defined transformative learning as

the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they

may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (p. 7)

The framework of transformative learning is itself comprehensive as there are multiple lenses through which transformative learning can be viewed. Within the field of adult education, there are seven lenses through which transformative learning is viewed as set out by Merriam et al. (2007). Taylor (2005) assigned these lenses to two groups based on their focus of learning. One group constitutes the learning concerns of the individual and includes the psycho-critical perspective of Mezirow (2000); the psycho-developmental approach of Daloz (1986); and the psycho-analytic approach of Boyd (1991). The other group focuses on sociocultural learning and is comprised of the social-emancipatory view of Freire (2000); the cultural-spiritual stance of Tisdell (2003); the race-centric lens of Johnson-Bailey and Alfred (2006) and of Sheared (1994); and the planetary approach of O'Sullivan (2002). Taken together, these seven approaches provide a relatively holistic view of transformative learning.

Within the psycho-critical perspective, Mezirow (2000) was concerned about how adults make meaning out of their life experiences by filtering sense impressions through their meaning perspectives or, in other words, their frames of reference. These frames of reference are comprised of a set of assumptions or predispositions about how we interpret the meaning of our experience. Transformation occurs when there is a change to one of our attitudes or beliefs or a set of our assumptions. The process of transformation, according to Mezirow, is to critically self-examine the assumptions about an experience in order to revise specific assumptions about oneself and others. A second component of the process is to engage in critical discourse about the new ideas. This is an effort to

build an empathic understanding of others' views as opposed to having an argumentative mindset. A third component of the transformative learning process is for the learner to take action in effecting the change whether it is on a personal or social level.

Daloz (1986) viewed adult education from a psycho-developmental perspective as a transformational process leading to a higher level of development. Learners examine their ideas about themselves and the world and formulate new, more developed perspectives. Daloz saw the importance of learners telling mutual stories about themselves in promoting higher cognitive development.

From a depth psychology perspective, Boyd (1991) viewed transformation as a process of individuation of the personality which is a fundamental change involving a resolution of an inner psychic conflict and expansion of consciousness. This psycho-analytic approach to transformation is also supported by Dirkx (1998) who focused on how people make sense of their lives through symbols and images in their psyche. The process is for individuals to identify these unconscious images and bring them to conscious recognition. By doing so, individuals will be less subject to unconscious compulsivity and obsessions.

The three foregoing models, psycho-critical, psycho-developmental, and psycho-analytic, pertain to the perspective of the individual. The following four models pertain to the sociocultural perspective. Freire (2000) viewed transformation in terms of personal empowerment and social transformation. Students and teachers are considered co-investigators into their sociocultural context. As learners become increasingly more aware of oppressive forces in their lives, learners come to a gradual sense of having control over their lives. Freire (2000) stated, "The ultimate goal of education is

liberation, or praxis; the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (p. 60).

Another perspective in the group of sociocultural models of transformative learning is the cultural-spiritual approach espoused by Tisdell (2003). Spirituality is seen as the fundamental meaning making process in people’s lives coupled with the role of culture. Exposing ourselves to cross-cultural relationships helps individuals to think of different ways of being in this world.

An approach to transformative learning that is race-centric is espoused by Johnson-Bailey and Alfred (2006). The goal of transformative learning here is to raise race consciousness of the group. In keeping with other forms of transformative learning, Merriam et al. (2007) note that in this approach, assumptions are deconstructed through dialogue with others.

A final sociocultural approach of transformative learning was espoused by O’Sullivan (2002). In this approach, people are encouraged to envision a larger cosmological context than the limited vision of a global market economy. It is important to understand how our quality of life is not simply our standard of living, but includes our need for community and the necessity to recognize diversity between communities.

Merriam et al. (2007) note that the following commonalities among all the transformative learning perspectives are that they (a) are constructivist in nature, (b) require dialogue that is either interpersonal or intrapersonal, (c) rely on critical reflection of the source of unexamined assumptions and beliefs, and (d) result in either personal or social change.

The following section provides a critical analysis of existing literature in the field of in anticipation of identifying knowledge gaps that exist in the field of AET.

Critical Analysis of the AET Literature

Much of the existing research on adult learner motivations for and barriers to participation in AET in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, has been carried out as survey research. This survey research has limitations in that it appears to have generated similar classifications of description of motivations for and barriers to AET as can be seen in the foregoing review of literature.

Moreover, where surveys had a low response rate, results will be limited in terms of generalizability. For example, Darkenwald and Valentine (1985) in using the DPS had a low response rate of 11% (i.e., 215 respondents from a sample size of 2,000) suggesting that the findings would not be broadly generalizable.

Some of the survey research had been carried out through random telephone surveys; for example, Hart et al. (2002) conducted 866 telephone interviews in a Canada-wide study to determine participation rates in adult literacy and upgrading programmes. This data may be limited to the extent that the participants were willing and able to recall and provide thoughtful and accurate answers to the survey questions about their choices in the past and present in regard to participation in AET.

In Canada, two major surveys have been administered within the last decade and many reports have drawn upon the data collected from them to inform the field of AET. These two major surveys are: (a) the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey 2003 (IALSS), conducted by Statistics Canada (2005), and (b) the Access and Support to Education and Training Survey 2008 (ASETS), conducted by Statistics Canada (2009a).

The IALSS 2003, administered by Statistics Canada (2005), sought to provide information on the level and distribution of literacy performance for Canadians in all provinces and territories and compared their levels of prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving abilities to an international standard. Data collection consisted of a 2-hour interview with approximately 25,000 individuals across Canada. The data collection consisted of educational testing techniques along with household survey research. This survey research had a complex design which involved stratification, multiple phases and stages, and systematic sampling techniques to enhance survey response and had a good response rate of 63%. From this perspective, this survey-based research would have high validity.

The ASETS 2008, administered by Statistics Canada (2009a), sought to integrate the issues in previous surveys related to approaches to educational planning, postsecondary education participation, and adult education and training. The sample consisted of 72,000 randomly selected telephone numbers. Data were collected from Canadian residents at a response rate of 64%. The data collection instrument was pretested and collection of responses was done using a computer assisted telephone interview (CATI) to ensure correct flow path of questions. This comprehensive survey appears to have been conducted consistent with acceptable survey research methods and, as a result, should provide valid data.

Although survey research can provide comprehensive data, Human Resources Development Canada (2001) indicated that large-scale data collections like the Adult Education and Training Survey concentrate almost solely on situational and institutional barriers to the exclusion of attitudinal barriers.

Data analysis of survey research typically consists of “noting response rates, checking for response bias, conducting descriptive analysis of all items, and then answering descriptive questions. It might also involve testing hypotheses or research questions using inferential statistics” (Creswell, 2005, p. 380). What a survey-based research approach does not do is allow the researcher to provide an in-depth explanation of a process and may, by virtue of closed-ended questions, restrict the responses of the participant compared with open-ended and broad questions posed in qualitative research (Creswell).

MacKeracher et al. (2006) recognized that “the survey methods typically used to identify barriers do not appear to be providing the quality of information needed to make decisions about how learning opportunities should be designed and delivered” (p. 24).

Hall and Donaldson’s (1997) study provides a good model for the qualitative methodology used in my study because it was one that was conducted within a qualitative paradigm, although employing a grounded theory approach as opposed to a phenomenographic approach, and which addressed the experiences of the particular sociocultural group of low-literacy women.

In the final section of this chapter, I will identify key knowledge gaps that exist in the AET literature.

Knowledge Gaps in the AET Literature

Baran, Bérubé, Roy, and Salmon (2000) identify key knowledge gaps in outcomes of adult learning, motivations for and barriers to adult learning, and informal learning. After reviewing the current state of knowledge on the topics of motivations for and barriers to adult learning, Baran et al. identified knowledge gaps, such as (a) responses to

surveys may not measure the degree to which responses reflect a respondent's motivations or barriers, (b) surveys do not provide the rationale for why a large number of adults neither perceive a need nor feel a desire to partake in training, and (c) surveys do not tell us if adults perceive a low return on their investment in training and, therefore, allow other restraints, such as finances or time, to be reflected as the reasons for nonparticipation.

Hart et al. (2002) found that there is a gap in the AET literature which addresses the particular concerns of marginalized groups and suggested that we likely do not have adequate information about the nonparticipation of individuals from groups other than low literacy, such as older adults, the disabled, those whose first language is not English or French, newcomers to Canada, or persons in low-wage jobs.

McLaren (1989) purported that to understand student experience is a primary factor not only for educators, but also for the students themselves. It is important to know how the social world is experienced by students. Through enhanced understanding, teachers can better tap into the drives, emotions, and interests that are reflected in a student's unique voice. McLaren stated, "We must take the *experiences* and *voices* of students themselves as a starting point" (p. 235) and that we must ask students to examine their beliefs, values, and assumptions that they use to make meaning out of their lives. In this regard, Crowther (2000) pointed towards "the importance of an approach which builds the curriculum from the lived experience of the learners—from their *habitus*" (p. 489).

MacKeracher et al. (2006), in a comprehensive review of literature which reported the state of the field of adult learning research, summarized the key challenges

yet to be addressed as: (a) determining the perceived and actual barriers experienced by nonparticipants, (b) examining the interactions among various types of barriers, (c) recognizing the changes in barriers over life transition periods, (d) examining the role of personal identity as a learner, and (e) applying existing research-based knowledge.

In the following section, I summarize the key concepts covered in the review of literature chapter.

Summary of Chapter Two

In the foregoing section, I reviewed literature in the field of AET that examined theories and research on learning theory, motivations for participation in AET, general barriers to participation in AET, structural barriers to participation in AET, and transformative learning in AET. I then followed this review with a critical analysis of the AET literature and knowledge gaps identified in the field of AET.

Merriam et al. (2007) concluded that there is no unifying theory of adult learning, but that there are a number of theories, models, and frameworks which capture some aspect of adult learning. Dewey (1938) influenced learning theory in general by developing a theory of experience, positing that there is a necessary relation between actual experience and education.

Lindeman (1989), drawing upon Dewey's theory of experience, purported that the highest resource in adult education is the learner's experience; therefore, adult education curriculum should be built around the needs and interests of the students. Lindeman maintained that although skill development is important to enhance effectiveness in the modern world, adult education should not be limited to adjusting to the specialism of industry if the worth of human personality and experience are to flourish.

Knowles (1980) advanced the model of andragogy defined as the art and science of helping adults learn. A major assumption in this model was that adults have a need to move from dependency to self-directedness which implies that teachers need to help students learn how to learn the skills of self-directed inquiry.

Jarvis (2004) situated the individual learner within the learner's social context. With globalization causing massive changes, lifelong learning has expected to become more instrumental in meeting the demands of the global marketplace which has shifted power and increased inequality and social exclusion.

Motivations for participation in AET were classified by Houle (1961) as goal-oriented, activity-oriented, and learning-oriented. To test this typology, the 43-item Education Participation Scale was developed by Boshier (1971) indicating that adult learners are either being- or deficiency-motivated. In a follow-up study, Boshier (1991) found that the New Education Participation Scale yielded seven factors of adult learner motivation including communications skills, social contact, educational upgrading, job skills, improving family relationships, entertainment, and seeking knowledge for its own sake. Confirming Boshier's (1991 seven-factor typology of adult learner motivation, Fujita-Starck (1996) conducted a study of adult learners in different curricular programmes at an American postsecondary institution.

In the United Kingdom, Gorard and Selwyn (2005) found that motivations were related to age, ethnicity, sex, family background, and initial schooling along with a learner identity that was not inimical to further study.

The AET literature has a multitude of research on general barriers to participation in AET. In a synthesis of research on motivations and barriers to adult learning, Cross (1981) classified deterrents as situational, institutional, and dispositional.

Examining how adult learners make the transitions from moving in, moving through, and moving out of a learning opportunity, Schlossberg (1984) developed a framework for understanding these transitions which comprised characteristics related to the transition, the individual, and the environment.

Continuing the quest to identify deterrents to participation in AET, Darkenwald and Valentine (1985) developed and administered the Deterrents to Participation Scale and found that the six factors of deterrence were (a) a lack of confidence, (b) a lack of course relevance, (c) time constraints, (d) low personal priority, (e) cost, and (f) personal problems.

Belenky et al. (1986) found that women's ways of knowing produced the voices of silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge with the ones having a voice of silence, feeling profoundly isolated in how they made and shared meaning.

Conceptualizing three factors that influence participation, Fagan (1991) found that these learner-inherent, life, and program factors interact with one another such that it is important in AET activities that there be interaction between the instructor and the student, activities are related to the learners' goals, and students are involved in their learning.

Loosely following the Deterrents to Participation Scale, Hall and Donaldson (1997) developed the Life Influence Model of Participation which identified factors

related to pre-adulthood, patterns of nonsupport in adulthood, conventional deterrents, and lack of voice in adulthood.

Long and Taylor (2002) and Hart et al. (2002) in a two-stage Canadian-wide survey found that life context factors and highly developed coping strategies made AET programmes appear irrelevant to adults' needs, and that concerns about participation in AET were hierarchical in nature placing socioeconomic/circumstantial and programme/policy-related concerns above those which were cognitive/emotive. Other conclusions from Hart et al. included the need to address structural and perceptual factors, dislodge inaccurate assumptions about literacy and upgrading programmes, and outreach with an appeal to people's strengths.

In a comprehensive summary of adult learner barriers, MacKeracher et al. (2006) concluded that of all the major classifications of barriers, the most problematic to document is that of the dispositional/attitudinal group and suggest that this category assumes there is some inadequacy on the part of the learner. They recommended further lines of inquiry include critical and participatory studies, focus more on low participatory groups, and contain more qualitative analyses.

I reviewed structural barriers to participation in AET in a section of its own because of their focus on macro-level factors. Taking a critical theory perspective, Freire (1973) posited that low levels of literacy are a direct result of oppressive social structures and unequal power relations in society and adult learners should take a critical stance in their learning to reveal the ideological underpinnings.

Jarvis (1985) claimed that there is a middle-class bias in AET programmes and that adult education serves to maintain the dominant culture. Moreover, Lindeman

(1989) purported that the purpose of adult education is to give meaning to experiences not to knowledge and that student voice will not be recognized if adult educators and policymakers are the ones constructing adult education. Student failure is an issue which McLaren (1989) critiqued as being a function of the lack of understanding on the part of the dominant culture about the behaviour, performance, cultural frames of reference, and everyday social practices of minority students who express resistance to AET. Rubenson (1998) similarly purported that much of the learning environment is structured by the middle class and that it is the middle class who is most likely to participate in adult learning opportunities. In addressing the attitude that people are apathetic about participating in AET, Crowther (2000) agreed that nonparticipation needs to be redefined in terms of resistance to the dominant culture.

According to Brookfield (2005), adult education is a series of critical learning tasks that should be undertaken by learners which include challenging ideology, unmasking power, contesting hegemony, overcoming alienation, pursuing liberation, reclaiming reason, and practising democracy.

I then reviewed the AET literature on the topic of transformative learning. Mezirow (2000) defined transformative learning as a process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will help guide our actions more justifiably. Merriam et al. (2007) outlined seven perspectives through which transformative learning is viewed including: (a) psycho-critical (Mezirow, 2000); (b) psycho-developmental (Daloz, 1986); (c) psycho-analytic (Boyd, 1991); (d) social-emancipatory (Freire, 2000); (e) cultural-spiritual (Tisdell,

2003); (f) race-centric (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006); and (g) planetary (O'Sullivan, 2002).

I then presented a critical analysis of the AET literature. It focused on the multitude of research in the field that has been conducted as survey research which has generated similar classifications of description of motivations for and barriers to AET. I outlined limitations to survey research such as low response rates, concerns about recall of previous educational experiences, surveys that concentrate almost solely on situational and institutional barriers to the exclusion of attitudinal factors, positivistic data analysis, use of closed-ended questions, and absence of qualitative data.

I concluded this review of the AET literature section with a look at key knowledge gaps in the field of AET including: (a) the gaps created by a high focus on survey research, (b) relatively less research conducted on marginalized groups, (c) an absence of research that takes student experiences and voices into consideration, (d) not building the curriculum from the lived experiences of the learner, (e) little examination of the interactions among various types of barriers, (f) not understanding the changes in barriers over life transition periods, (g) not emphasizing personal identity as a learner, and (h) unsuccessfully applying existing research-based knowledge.

In light of the wide body of literature that exists on learner motivations for and barriers to participation in AET which typically has been analyzed quantitatively, and where there is recognition of a significant gap of qualitative studies, my conducting this inquiry using a phenomenographic case study approach will contribute more qualitative research to the field of AET. This approach employed qualitative methods of data

collection and analysis and is explained in detail in the following chapter on methodology.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of participation in adult education and training programmes offered by publicly funded school boards or their arms-length affiliate. Given that the aim of this study was to gain an understanding of and reconstruct the reported lived experiences of the participants, it was appropriate that I situated the study in a constructivist/interpretivist inquiry paradigm, assumed an ontological position of relativism, accepted a transactional/subjectivist epistemology, and employed a hermeneutical/dialectical methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Within an inquiry paradigm of constructivism/interpretivism, according to Guba and Lincoln (2005), the nature of reality is that it consists of local and specific constructed and co-constructed realities, the nature of knowledge consists of transactional/subjectivist and created findings, and the nature of inquiry methods is hermeneutical/dialectical. Moreover, within a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, the stance of the researcher is that of a “passionate participant” who facilitates reconstruction of multiple voices (p. 196). Qualitative research methods, according to Guba and Lincoln, can fall within the constructivist/interpretivist research paradigm and are defined as specific methods that use qualitative data.

Phenomenographic Approach

As the aim of this study was to explore the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of participation in AET programmes, it was appropriate that I employed a phenomenographic approach. Phenomenography is defined by Marton (1981) as research that is directed towards describing how individuals

experience a particular phenomenon. As such, phenomenography falls within the constructivist/interpretivist inquiry paradigm.

Phenomenology is also a research approach that may be confused with phenomenography. Van Manen (1990) purported that phenomenological research was borne out of the philosophical foundation of hermeneutic phenomenology. As such, it is anchored in the lifeworld of the individual. Heidegger (1926/1962) espoused the philosophy of hermeneutic phenomenology which emphasized interpretation and understanding of text. Van Manen stated, “The *facts* of lived experience need to be captured in language (human science text) and this is inevitably an interpretive process” (p. 181). Moreover, Van Manen defined hermeneutic phenomenology as “a human science which studies persons” (p. 6) and claimed that it is a theory of the unique as opposed to researching for knowledge that is generalizable. Similarly, Davis (2002) stated, “Phenomenology addresses experience from the perspective of the individual and is based on the assumption that people have a unique way of making meaning of their experience” (p. 511).

Phenomenological research is aimed at uncovering the essence, meaning, or structure of experience rather than providing a conceptualization of the experience by taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it, according to Van Manen (1990). The term *Verstehen*, originally used by Weber (1946), refers to the interpretation of meaning, according to Martin (2000). Proponents of *Verstehen* argued that the study of social phenomena should be approached differently than that of natural phenomena because of the difference in the subject matter (Martin).

Marton (1981) argued that gaining knowledge about a particular phenomenon (phenomenology) is not the same as gaining knowledge about how individuals experience a particular phenomenon (phenomenography). He explained this as the difference between a first-order perspective and a second-order perspective, respectively, and stated,

In the first and by far the most commonly adopted perspective we orient ourselves towards the world and make statements about it. In the second perspective we orient ourselves towards people's ideas about the world (or their experience of it) and we make statements about people's ideas about the world (or about their experience of it). (p. 178)

The rationale Marton used to support a second-order perspective in research is that there is potential for learning new knowledge. The kind of knowledge derived from this second-order perspective is separate and apart from that which can be derived from a first-order perspective.

Marton (1981) outlined the following four distinctions between phenomenology and phenomenography:

1. The phenomenologist aims at learning about the phenomenon through people's experience; the phenomenographer aims at learning about people's experience of the phenomenon.
2. The notion of essence (the common, inter-subjective meaning of an aspect) is central to phenomenology; the notion of a limited number of qualitatively different ways of experiencing an aspect is the domain of phenomenography.

3. Phenomenology pertains to methodology; phenomenography pertains to what can be said about an experience of a phenomenon.
4. Phenomenology is directed towards pre-reflective consciousness—just the experiential; phenomenography deals with both the experiential and the conceptual which includes pre-reflective thought as well as what is thought of as that which is lived. The latter would include that which is culturally learned and the individually developed ways we relate to ourselves and others.

Given the above distinctions, I will hereafter refer to the type of research that I conducted in this inquiry as phenomenographic research.

In keeping with Marton's (1981) description of phenomenography above, the phenomenographic approach I took in this study allowed me as the researcher to (a) learn about the experiences of undereducated adults about the phenomenon of participation in AET, (b) provide a limited number of qualitatively different ways of experiencing the phenomenon of participation in AET, (c) state what could be said about the undereducated adults' experience of the phenomenon of participation in AET, and (d) represent the undereducated adults' pre-reflective thought as well as what was thought to be lived in terms of the phenomenon of participation in AET .

An expectation of a phenomenographic research approach is that I, as the researcher, combine all ways of experiencing the phenomenon of participation in AET from the perspectives of the participants into an outcome space (Akerlind, 2005). I will explain the outcome space further in the data analysis section. Since I combined the varied experiences of participants, it follows that I treated the set of reported experiences as parts of a whole; therefore, I considered the group of participants as one case rather

than considering each individual participant as a case each unto himself/herself. The following section outlines my rationale for employing a phenomenographic case study design.

Phenomenographic Case Study Design

Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) purported that the term case study in research is used to refer to a methodology or a unit of analysis depending on the purpose of the study. Merriam (1998) defined case study as an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single unit or bounded system” (p. 12). In keeping with Merriam’s notion of a bounded system, I considered the group of 11 participants in this study to be one bounded system by virtue of their common distinguishing factor of belonging to the group of undereducated adults participating in AET. Accordingly, I have identified the design of this study as a phenomenographic case study. Merriam suggested that it is not uncommon that other methodologies are combined with the case study design and offered examples of hybrid designs, such as an ethnographic case study, a grounded theoretical case study, or a critical case study.

Although my focus was on understanding the lived experiences of undereducated adult learners in AET programmes, critical themes related to the broader sociopolitical context surrounding the Canadian AET system were identified from the participant data. If I had intended this study to be designed as a critical inquiry, it necessarily would have had to have been aimed at emancipating and empowering the participants. Although I did not intend for this study to be a critical inquiry, I did report where participants described insights they gained into themselves as a learner or into the structural aspects of the AET system by virtue of their participation in an AET programme.

Assumptions on the Methodological Approach

An assumption in choosing a phenomenographic approach to the methodology was that I could glean insights into the lived experiences of undereducated adult learners participating in an AET programme through their descriptions of their participation. In choosing to sample 11 participants and using a phenomenographic model of analysis, I assumed that I would be able to collect enough data to explore a variety of lived experiences described by the participants about the phenomenon of participation in AET programmes.

Sampling

Typically, a phenomenographic research study sample is small. Accordingly, in order to maximize the likelihood that qualitative variations would be found in participants' descriptions, I aimed at drawing a sample from as much diversity in participant circumstances as possible. Patton (2002) recommended that "qualitative sampling designs specify minimum samples based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study and stakeholder interests" (p. 246). In keeping with the expectation of a small sample size in qualitative studies, I sampled 10 undereducated adults and 1 higher-educated adult who were participating in an AET programme. Although the study focus was primarily on undereducated adults (i.e., those with a high school level of formal education or less), I chose to allow one participant to be part of the study who was higher-educated with a Bachelor's degree. The rationale for this was that she had not had any further training or education in the field since she earned the degree 10 years prior, she had not worked in the field for which her degree was earned, and she was participating in an AET retraining programme offered by an

arms-length affiliate of an Ontario school board with a similar goal to find a career for which she felt she did not have, as was the case with the other participants. I thought it would be of interest to see if the descriptions of her lived experiences as a participant in an AET programme were much different to those of the undereducated participants. After interviewing her in the same way as with all other participants, I found that she had similar goals, challenges, and descriptions of experience as any of the other participants; therefore, I included her responses in the collective of participant data that were analyzed. Had her experiences been quite different and obviously set apart from the other descriptions, I would have chosen not to include her data.

The sample consisted of 7 females and 4 males who ranged in age from 18 to 58 years with a median age of 41 years. I drew a purposive sample of participants as representative as possible across four broad geographic regions of the province of Ontario. These regions included Southern Ontario, the Greater Toronto Area, Eastern Ontario, and Northern Ontario. I had made efforts to establish a research site in the Western Ontario region, but because of the timing of the data collection (summer), there were no sites in that geographic area which were able to be identified.

Four AET organizations from which the study participants were drawn constituted the research sites in this study. Three of the research sites offered AET programmes at arm's-length to their respective publicly funded school board whereas one other research site offered AET programmes directly under the auspices of the publicly funded school board. An arms-length affiliate is a not-for-profit incorporated entity with which a school board partners that has its own board of directors and staff. Surpluses from an arms-length affiliate flow back to the school board to support its operations. Many Ontario

school boards themselves, or in partnership with their arms-length affiliate, offer programmes for adults including, but not limited to, programmes in literacy, numeracy, English-as-a-second-language, high school credit upgrading, credit courses leading to the Ontario Secondary School Diploma, skills training, and general interest courses.

The range of programmes within which the participants of this study were engaged is described as follows: (a) long-term (i.e., 12-18 months.), (b) medium-term (i.e., 6 months), and (c) short-term (i.e., 2-3 months). Some of the programmes were being offered on a full-time basis, such as 30 hours per week on a Monday to Friday schedule. Others had flexible hours throughout the week, such as those that required the student to be in class for at least 17 hours per week over a certain number of days or evenings. Programme types ranged from apprenticeship, college or university preparation, to preparation for direct entry to a job in a familiar field or a completely new sector. For example, 2 participants were engaged full time in an 18-month programme for pre-apprenticeship skilled trades training; 2 participants were attending full time in a 10-month programme to prepare them for a career as a Personal Support Worker; 3 participants were enrolled in a 6-month skills training programme to acquire a diploma in Supply Chain and Inventory Management; 3 participants were attending modules with flexible hours over a 3-month period of time in secondary school credit upgrading courses in preparation for entry to college, university, or the workplace; and 1 participant was enrolled in a 2-month skilled trades exploration programme while also studying to write the assessment for the General Education Diploma (GED).

All participants claimed to have some kind of pragmatic goal. Some were pursuing learning to attain a credential, such as the Ontario Secondary School Diploma,

upgraded marks in certain credits, or the GED as a prerequisite for entry to postsecondary education. Others were pursuing a certificate or diploma in a particular labour-market field with the goal of re-employment. A couple of participants were pursuing a chance to obtain an apprenticeship. One participant was looking to find a job that was not as physically demanding as she had had in her previous manufacturing job, and one was working to improve her English literacy skills. Apart from the pragmatic purposes of taking an AET programme just described, several of the participants noted that they were pursuing learning to improve their self-confidence. One participant stated that she had chosen to upgrade her knowledge and skills in an effort to avoid being on welfare.

Ethics

It is important in a research study to consider ethical issues which could arise in the research process (Jones et al., 2006). The areas in which ethical issues could arise include the statement of purpose, research questions, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, presentation of findings, and the researcher's role (Creswell, 2003). Jones et al. indicated other areas in which ethical issues could emerge, such as in sampling and ways of representing participants' cultural situatedness. They noted that a statement of informed consent is a document signed by each of the participants that addresses these ethical principles and typically contains statements from the researcher about "confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, avoidance of deception, respect, privacy, and *do no harm*" (p. 155).

In this research study, I ensured that the ethics requirements were met by completing the online Tri-Council Policy Tutorial required by the Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics (Appendix A), and by meeting the requirements set out by the

Research Ethics Board of Brock University(Appendix B). In particular, I had each participant sign a consent form which addressed the issues mentioned above and served to protect the participants from the typical kinds of risks that are associated with research. Included in the Informed Consent was a section that invited the subjects to participate in the research inquiry, stated the purpose of the study, outlined the potential benefits and risks to them, addressed the status of participation as voluntary with the right to decline at any time, indicated how the results would be published and how they would be shared with the participants, stated how and for how long data will be stored prior to disposal, and gave contact information of those involved in the research along with confirmation of the Brock University REB clearance information . In order to have assured that this document was thoroughly reviewed and understood by participants, I took the form with me to each research site and reviewed the information with potential subjects prior to having them sign the form. A summary of this research study was forwarded to each participant after the research study was written.

Despite the use of the informed consent in addressing the concerns about protecting participants, it is not a guarantee that a researcher will always be able to disguise the research context or identity of the participants because of the nature of qualitative research. Patton (2002) suggested that a researcher needs to ask “what are reasonable promises of confidentiality that can be fully honoured” and then to offer only those assurances that the researcher believes can be delivered (p. 408). Patton claimed that “informed consent, in this regard, does not automatically mean confidentiality. Informed consent can mean that participants understand the risks and benefits” (p. 412). In this study, I was careful to ensure that participants understood the risks and benefits by

providing them with a clear and complete informed consent document and answered any questions which they had.

Other areas that can pose unintended harm, according to Jones et al. (2006), could be in the way in which interview questions are posed that may unintentionally be culturally inappropriate or insensitive or in the way that results are interpreted in an unfavourable light. Throughout the study, I remained cognizant and careful of this factor by using language that was diplomatic and by not using politically incorrect terms.

Obtaining Access to Research Participants

The following outlines the steps that I took to obtain access to research sites and participants:

1. I approached service providers of AET programmes who were member organizations of the Employment and Skills Development (ESD) Committee under the auspices of the Ontario Association of Adult and Continuing Education School Board Administrators (CESBA) as these member organizations offered formal and non-formal AET programmes. My rationale in choosing to access research sites through this group was that I was familiar with them from a professional context. In this respect, my sample while being purposive (Creswell, 2005) was also a sample of convenience as I had easy access to the gatekeepers of these sites. I had been a participating member on this ESD Committee and had represented a site myself in my professional role as Co-ordinator of an Adult and Continuing Education Department at an Ontario school board. By entering research sites similar to those with which I had had professional experience, I felt as though I entered with some

knowledge of the norms, values, beliefs, and behaviours of the group which is considered to be of value in qualitative research settings, according to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983). The member organizations of the ESD Committee were chosen as the gatekeepers because they held formal authority for granting consent to enter their respective sites to conduct research or had been in a position to refer the application to an appropriate authority if needed. These criteria, in order to be deemed gatekeepers, were identified by Glesne and Peshkin (1992).

2. I then forwarded the following documents to the research site gatekeepers via email—samples of which can be found attached as: (a) Appendix C, Application to Research Site to Conduct a Study; (b) Appendix D, Research Site Agreement; (c) Appendix E, Summary of Research Proposal; (d) Appendix F, Recruitment of Participants: Steps and Verbal Script; and (e) Appendix G, Selection Criteria.
3. I then asked these gatekeepers to have their adult education teachers review the research study objectives with selected adult learners in their classrooms in an attempt to generate interest by learners in participating in this study. The purpose in having teachers present to selected adult learners was not to introduce bias into the study, but to have a pool of potential participants who would be more likely to participate for the value of the participation itself and not for the stipend that would be offered. I also asked that classroom teachers, in order to maintain confidentiality, direct interested candidates to contact me directly as the principal investigator.

4. Once interested learners contacted me directly of their interest, I determined that they would be appropriate candidates for the study based on my goal of getting a small sample with as broad demographic, cultural, and situational backgrounds as I could to be as representative as possible. I then forwarded to them an email confirmation by way of the Selection Status for Study Participation-Form A (Appendix H). At that time, I also introduced myself and made arrangements for an initial face-to-face visit. For participants who might not have been selected to participate, I was prepared with a modified Selection Status for Study Participation-Form B (Appendix H) which would have advised the applicants that they had been placed on a waiting list and would be notified within a reasonable timeframe of their status. This would have allowed for a waiting list should any of the selected participants change his/her mind at the outset of the study and a new participant could then have been identified quickly. As it turned out, a waiting list was not established because there were only enough participants stepping forward as was appropriately needed and they, fortunately, represented a wide variety of demographic, cultural, and situational backgrounds.
5. Once I had made arrangements with each potential participant for an initial face-to-face visit, I subsequently entered the research sites in June, 2009. During the first face-to-face visit, I reviewed the objectives of the study and the participant rights and expectations with the selected participants and had each participant sign the informed consent. I ensured that I mentioned to potential participants that if their participation in the study at any time causes

them to have negative feelings that are too uncomfortable, they could choose not to continue to participate or they could talk with a specific person who had been identified at their research site as providing counselling services for students.

6. Once all the informational and required ethics paperwork was completed with the candidates, I subsequently carried out the data collection in June and July 2009.

If a sufficient number of research participants had not been secured by this approach, I would have extended my search of potential research sites past the ESD Committee members to the broader population of AET service deliverers of organizations affiliated with CESBA.

Data Collection

I collected data from 10 undereducated adult learners and 1 with higher education in AET programmes in Ontario school boards or their arms-length training affiliate which consisted of demographic data, voice recordings from two face-to-face interviews, weekly electronic critical incident reports, and my reflexive journaling as the principal investigator after each face-to-face encounter with the participants. This process met the generally accepted requirement of at least three sources of data referred to as triangulation which contributes to the reliability of a research study.

I piloted the initial interview questions with two representative adult learners in an adult learning facility in a region in Ontario that was not one of the research sites of this study. From that pilot, I was prompted to modify a couple of the interview questions

where I felt it was necessary to evoke greater comprehension of the questions by participants.

At an initial face-to-face visit, in addition to having reviewed the informed consent and having had it signed by each participant, I administered the Participant Demographic Profile Questionnaire (Appendix I) that collected demographic information about each of the participants. It was indicated to participants that they had the choice of not providing any data in the profile for which they did not wish. I then engaged each participant in a 1.0-1.5 hour semi-structured interview using the Initial Interview Guide (Appendix J) that was designed to build familiarity, trust, and rapport and to elicit background information about the learning experiences, motivations, and barriers that the learner had had in the past and around the participant's decision to have entered into an AET programme at that time. Patton (2002) stated that rapport is built upon "the ability to convey empathy and understanding without judgment" (p. 366). It is important, according to Jones et al. (2006), that a researcher have a genuine regard for the participants as individuals and an honest commitment to understanding their experiences. I recorded the interview on a digital recording device and later had the interview data transcribed verbatim.

In addition to recording the interview data, I reviewed with each participant the instructions contained on the Weekly Electronic Critical Incident Report (Appendix K). This included the expectation that he/she submit a weekly critical incident report with his/her thoughts, feelings, and actions in regard to his/her experiences while engaged in the AET programme. These reports were forwarded to me by each of the participants via email on a weekly basis of which I acknowledged receipt and to which I responded in

order to prompt further reflection by the participants on the emerging discussion themes. The use of the Weekly Electronic Critical Incident Reports, I thought, would provide a viable alternative method for participants to share their reactions to each week's participation in their AET programme and reflect on what they wanted to say, unlike the immediacy of responses required in a face-to-face interview. I was disappointed in the volume of responses that I got from this method despite regular prompting of the participants to submit them.

Immediately following each of the participant face-to-face interviews, I made entries to my reflexive journal on immediate impressions of the participant and his/her frame of mind and involvement in the AET programme at that time. This immediacy afforded me an opportunity to capture what I felt was the essence of the interview right at that time and to analyze the participants' comments in the context of their behaviour and body language.

As the final step in the data collection, I made a second face-to-face visit to each of the participants (except for 2 who had not responded to my attempts to set up a second interview) and conducted another 1.0-1.5 hour semi-structured interview with a focus on exploring what the current perceptions were of the training experience of each of the participants. It is here that I used the Final Interview Guide (Appendix L). I also gave each participant the planned nominal \$50 cash honourarium of which I had promised at the outset of the study. This financial incentive was intended to be kept modest so that participants would be more motivated by what they would gain personally from their participation than what they could gain financially.

Throughout the 5-week data collection period and the ensuing transcription period, I regularly shared each participants' responses with them in an effort to verify that I had captured what they had intended to say around the evolving interview themes.

I completed the follow-up phase approximately 2 months following the end of the data collection period by forwarding a feedback letter via email to each participant thanking them for their participation in the research study. A summary report of the findings of the study was subsequently sent to each participant and to each of the gatekeepers once the research study had concluded and the report was accepted as complete in August, 2012.

Data Analysis

In this research study, I used a phenomenographic model in the data analysis for the interview and critical incident report data. According to Marton (1981), the outcome to be expected in phenomenographic research is the explication of categories of description about a phenomenon and that the categories should not be considered "categories for classifying individuals, but as categories for describing ways of perceiving the world around us" (p.195). Marton and Booth (1997) stated, the outcome of phenomenographic research is a "structured pool of ideas, conceptions, and beliefs underlying the possible interpretations (or possible constructions) of reality" (p. 198).

The categories of description about a phenomenon are not expected to represent the correct meaning of a phenomenon necessarily, but are expected to reflect the meaning which participants place on an experience. It is important not to restrict our attention, according to Marton (1981), to "correct knowledge only" (p. 182) as individuals fashion their actions, beliefs, attitudes, and modes of experiencing on whatever they feel they

know. Marton and Booth (1997) argued that the challenge is not in the search for the correct interpretation, but for a defensible interpretation. Uljens (1996) similarly indicated that in a phenomenographic approach, it is not how well findings correspond to the reality of human experience, but it is how well they correspond to the phenomenon as it is experienced by the participants.

With respect to phenomenographic data analysis, Marton & Booth (1997) referred to the set of categories of description as the outcome space and explained that this outcome space allows us to look at the collective human experience of phenomena in a holistic manner at least in how it is represented by the sample group at a particular time. Therefore, participant transcripts are interpreted within the context of the group of transcripts in terms of similarities and differences from other meanings in transcripts (Akerlind, Bowden, & Green, 2005). Furthermore, Akerlind (2005) pointed out that the categories of description in an outcome space typically have a hierarchical structure; however, it is possible the categories could be related in a “branching” (p. 329) structure.

In analyzing data, Marton and Booth (1997) set out three criteria for judging the quality of the descriptions in the outcome space which include:

1. Each category of description in the outcome space should reveal something distinctive about the phenomenon.
2. The categories are represented as a structural hierarchy within the outcome space.
3. The critical variation in meanings is represented in as few categories as possible.

During data analysis, Akerlind (2005) recommended that transcripts be read with a high degree of openness to possible meanings in the early stages followed by a greater focus on particular criteria, but continually within a framework of openness to new interpretations. Akerlind stated, “The whole process is a strongly iterative and comparative one, involving the continual sorting and re-sorting of data, plus ongoing comparisons between the data and the developing categories of description, as well as between the categories themselves” (p. 324). Selected quotes are then isolated and brought together into categories according to similarities. Within this pool of meanings, the researcher focuses on one aspect of the object, seeking its dimensions of variation while at the same time, holding other aspects at bay. Focus must be kept on the interviewees as a group because, by working with individual whole transcripts, the risk then becomes encouraging an analytic focus on the individual interviewee.

Researchers have the option to use a software package to assist in the analysis of qualitative data. As I had sought the assistance of an external service provider to do the transcription of the interviews I, therefore, wanted to become more familiar with the data by conducting the data analysis manually. This allowed me to practice my analytic skills.

Validity

The concept of validity in qualitative research, according to Akerlind (2005), refers to the extent to which an inquiry is seen to investigate what it had aimed to investigate or to what degree the research findings are reflective of the phenomenon under investigation. The research findings in this study, presented in detail in Chapter Four, demonstrate that the study investigated the motivations for and barriers to participation in AET, the needs met and not met in AET, perceptions of academic and

personal growth, the value placed on AET, the perceptions of reasons for nonparticipation in AET, and the perceptions of changes to oneself or in one's beliefs about AET. These findings show that this study investigated what it had aimed to examine by virtue of the posed research questions.

Controlling for researcher bias, or the concept of researcher objectivity, is another concept related to validity in qualitative research. As I have a professional background in the field of adult education, I was aware throughout the research period that my understanding of AET could be a potential source of bias. Bowden (2005) explained that phenomenographers have a non-dualist stance in that the world is neither constructed by the individual, nor imposed from the outside; therefore, Bowden acknowledged that there is "a relation between the researcher and the phenomenon and a relation between the researcher and the subjects" (p. 12).

To mitigate researcher bias, Bowden recommended practices, such as using an identical opening scenario for each interview, avoiding making further substantive input into the interviews, and supporting categories of description with evidence from the transcripts. As in keeping with Bowden's (2005) recommendations, during the interviews, I adhered to the semi-structured questions that I had prepared as the interview guide, avoided introducing new ideas in the interviews, probed interview responses only as far as needed to elicit an understanding of the participants' intended meanings, and was careful not to judge any participant response as right or wrong. Merriam and Associates (2002) recommended bracketing, or putting aside, one's personal attitudes or beliefs about the phenomenon. I remained aware of my understanding and experiences of

adult education and allowed participants to voice their opinions whether I agreed with them or not.

Guba and Lincoln (2005) characterized validity, or trustworthiness in qualitative research, as authenticity which includes: (a) the notion of fairness (i.e., the representation in the text of all stakeholder perspectives, concerns, and voices); (b) the notions of ontological and educative authenticity (i.e., a raised level of awareness by the study participants and others who surround them); and (c) the notions of catalytic and tactical authenticity (i.e., the ability of an inquiry to prompt social action—movement toward changing structural aspects of the AET system).

This research study meets Guba and Lincoln's (2005) notion of fairness in that I (a) allowed participants to clarify intended meanings in data collected; (b) used a high level of verbatim quotes by all 11 participants presented in the findings; and (c) had a critical friend, who holds a Master of Education degree, conduct random checks of all the participant transcripts for corroboration of the verbatim data I reported. A letter of certification from this critical friend and a summary of the transcript reference pages that were checked were reviewed by my thesis advisor.

I did not seek feedback from interviewees after all participant transcript data were combined as Akerlind (2005) stated, "Seeking feedback from interviewees is not regarded as an appropriate phenomenographic validity check" (p. 330) because the interpretation of text is considered a holistic one being representative of many views.

In addition to meeting the criteria for fairness, this study also met the expectations of Guba and Lincoln (2005) for ontological and educative authenticity. For example, the participants indicated becoming more aware of themselves as learners (ontological) and

of the AET system (educative) as a result of being asked as a participant in this study to reflect on their daily experiences as a learner in an AET programme. I do not believe the study held much, if any, catalytic and tactical authenticity, according to Guba and Lincoln, as the study was not designed as a critical inquiry that would have expected to have resulted in prompting social action.

Kvale (1996) described a pragmatic validity check in which research findings are seen as useful and have the potential to instigate action. The research findings of this study have pragmatic validity in terms of Kvale's definition because they point to four qualitatively different ways in which the participants reported their experiences of participation in AET programmes which has generated implications to AET practice. Implications generated are discussed in Chapter Five.

Reliability

Reliability can pertain in qualitative research to the transferability of the findings to other contexts. Guba (1981) referred to improving transferability of findings to other contexts by making available as a supplement to interested parties a full description of contextual factors. In an effort to meet this criterion for reliability, I included a description of each of the participant's context in Appendix N.

Kvale's (1996) notion of reliability in qualitative research pertained to using appropriate methods to enhance the quality of data interpretations. Kvale described two forms of reliability check relating to coder reliability and dialogic reliability. In the former, two researchers are used to independently code the transcripts and compare categories; and in the latter, researchers discuss and critique the data and each other's interpretations looking for agreement. As I was the principal and sole investigator in this

study, these forms of reliability check are not applicable. This may be considered by some as a limitation of this study discussed in the prior section on study limitations. However, Akerlind (2005) noted that of both these two forms of reliability check, although used to varying degrees within phenomenographic research, neither is used in a uniform manner.

As in any method of data analysis, there can be limitations. Potential limitations of phenomenographic data analysis are:

1. The researcher simply lists the different ways of experiencing a phenomenon rather than interpreting the structure of the experiences (Marton, 1981).
2. The researcher is not able to keep an open mind to all of the transcript material (if there is abundance) in his/her mind at once (Akerlind, 2005).
3. The researcher may potentially impose a structure upon the data rather than allowing the structure to emerge from the data (Bowden, 1996).

My interpretation of four qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of participation in AET addresses the notion of a hierarchical structure in the sense that one category of description appeared to be the most salient to all participants by virtue of the relatively higher volume of participant references made to this category compared with the other three categories. This structure will be discussed further in the findings section.

Keeping an open mind to the totality of the transcript material was indeed a challenge due to the volume of data, but I found it got easier with each round of review that I performed on the transcripts as I began to recall and remember familiar passages made in the transcripts. In the interpretation process, I believe it is impossible for a

researcher not to bring his/her own meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 2000) to his/her understanding of the world even if he/she makes a conscious effort to do so.

Accordingly, as much as I tried to keep an open mind while identifying evolving categories of description from the combined transcript data, it is possible I imposed a structure on the data to the extent of what I could see in the data.

A primary form of reliability check, according to Guba (1981) is for researchers to clearly outline to their readers the steps involved in the research process. In keeping with Guba's definition of reliability, I present in the following an outline of the steps I took in the data analysis, therefore, contributing to the reliability of the findings of this study:

1. I conducted two pilot interviews of my interview questions in a site separate and apart from the research sites that I used in the study. This provided me with a chance to modify the questions in a way that provided for better interpretation of the questions by the study participants.
2. I had the 20 voice-recorded interviews of the 11 study participants transcribed verbatim by an external transcription agency with the earlier interviews beginning to be transcribed before the second interviews had taken place. The ideal would have been for me to do the transcription myself to become more familiar with the data, but time constraints precluded this. The risk of having external transcriptionists is that they may miss transcribing some data that were recorded or may not be able to discern words and, hence, interpret them. However, the transcriptionists in this case left a marker for me to review the voice recordings where they were not sure of any words or phrases. I also

printed the Weekly Electronic Critical Incident Reports made by participants and they acted as further transcripts.

3. I then read through all interview transcripts and, where there were markers left by the transcriptionists for inaudible interview data, I reviewed these sections of the audio recordings and filled in the transcript data that were missing, occasionally having to use the context of the sentence to prompt recognition of certain words. Once the transcript data were corrected for missing elements, I regularly shared each participants' responses with them in an effort to verify that I had captured what they had intended to say around the evolving interview themes. I also regularly prompted participants to reflect further on the emerging discussion themes in the Weekly Critical Incident Reports.
4. Then, by focusing on each of the interview questions in turn, I read through each of the transcripts from the first round of face-to-face interviews coding each transcript section with initial impressions of broad categories of description that I could see. For example, I coded the responses to Question 1 for Participant A (Abbey). I then moved to coding the responses to the same question for Participant B (Bonnie) and continued this process until all 11 participants' transcripts were coded with initial broad categories of description. I repeated this process with the transcripts from the second round of face-to-face interviews. Concurrently, I was also coding the participant weekly critical incident reports as they were sent to me by the participants.

5. Once all the data were coded with initial broad categories of descriptions, I entered one-word descriptors of these initial broad categories of description into a spreadsheet categorized by columns relating to each interview question and by rows relating to each participant (Appendix M, Initial Categories of Description). This gave me a snapshot of the broad categories of description across all participants.
6. I then studied these descriptors on the spreadsheet until I began to glean a sense of narrower/more inclusive categories of description. When I had narrowed the initial categories from their early identification, I then compared and contrasted these categories with each other to try to come up with fewer and more inclusive categories. I eventually settled on a conceptualization of four main categories of description after several readings of the transcripts to get not only the overall sense of the intended meanings of the group of participants, but also searched for clear evidence in the verbatim statements of the participants that would support my interpretations of their meanings. I also referred to my reflexive notes which I had made after each of the interviews and throughout the study in an effort to further support my impressions of the meaning I was making of the data. The process of selecting salient participant transcript data required continual iteration and reiteration of categories of description until I was able to conceptualize the findings that I explicated.
7. Since I analyzed the data from all the transcripts as a collective, I reported findings on the collective data. Although the reported findings are on the

collective data, I did attach as Appendix N a summary of each of the participant's context in order to enhance the contextual understanding of each of the participants which contributes to transferability of findings to other contexts.

Summary of Chapter Three

In keeping with the purpose of this research study, I situated the inquiry in a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm and employed a hermeneutical/dialectical methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). As lived experiences of participants were the object of this study, I took a phenomenographic approach (Marton, 1981). In this study, I provided descriptions of the lived experiences of undereducated adults of the phenomenon of participation in AET.

As phenomenological and phenomenographic research may be confused with each other, I discussed the differences between them. Phenomenological research, according to Van Manen (1990), is aimed at uncovering the essence, meaning, or structure of experience rather than providing a conceptualization of the experience. Phenomenographic research, on the other hand, according to Marton, is aimed at gaining knowledge about how individuals experience a particular phenomenon. I then provided a detailed outline of the differences between phenomenology and phenomenography, according to Marton. Since this study used mixed methods from both phenomenography and case study methodologies, it was termed a phenomenographic case study.

In this study, I sampled 10 undereducated adults and 1 higher-educated adult participating in an AET programme. The participants were drawn from a variety of AET

programmes at publicly funded school boards or their arms-length training affiliate across four geographic areas of the province of Ontario.

I reviewed the ethics requirements for this study in light of the expectations of the Tri-Council Policy of the Advisory Panel on Research Ethics and the Research Ethics Board of Brock University. Documents associated with the ethics approval process were reviewed and I outlined the detailed steps in gaining access to research participants.

I then provided in-depth descriptions of the data collection processes in respect of the pilot interviews, the participant demographic information, the face-to-face interviews, the participant weekly critical incident reports, and the researcher reflexive journaling.

Following next, I described the phenomenographic approach to data analysis which included a review of the various analytic processes espoused by Marton (1981), Uljens (1996), Marton and Booth (1997), Akerlind (2005), and Akerlind et al. (2005).

I then provided definitions of research validity in qualitative studies as cited by various authors that included: (a) how reflective the findings are of the phenomenon under investigation, as espoused by Akerlind (2005); (b) how authentic the findings are, as purported by Guba and Lincoln (2005); and (c) how pragmatic the findings are, as defined by Kvale (1996).

A discussion of research reliability in qualitative studies followed which included: (a) how contextual descriptions add to transferability to other contexts, according to Guba (1981); (b) how coder and dialogic reliability checks, as espoused by Kvale (1996), contribute to reliability, although not used consistently in phenomenographic research, according to Akerlind (2005); and (c) how a detailed outline of the research process, as

supported by Guba (1981), contributes to reliability. I then provided a detailed outline of the research process I employed in this study.

I concluded this chapter with a review of general limitations of phenomenographic research including: (a) listing ways of experiencing a phenomenon rather than interpreting the structure of experience (Marton, 1981), (b) the ability of the researcher to keep an open mind in the data analysis (Akerlind, 2005), and (c) the potential for the researcher to impose a structure on the data (Bowden, 1996) along with providing limitations of this study that I perceived.

In the following chapter, I present a detailed account of the results of this study including the findings from the demographic data, the analysis of the participant phenomenographic data, and my reflexive notes as the researcher.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I, as the principal investigator, report a detailed account of the lived experiences of the 11 study participants as the accounts were described by them while participating in their respective AET programmes. To review, the purpose of this study was to explore the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported experiencing the phenomenon of participation in adult education and training programmes offered by publicly funded school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

Although all participants shared the commonality of pursuing AET to meet a pragmatic goal, such as finding a new job or career or preparing for postsecondary education, their perspectives on their involvement in AET oftentimes differed significantly among them. For example, some perspectives were of an optimistic nature whereas others were more pessimistic. Optimism seemed to be more widely shared as various participants saw their involvement in their AET programme as a privilege, an opportunity, a chance for exploration and discovery, an incentive, a relief from physically demanding work, a social connection, a relevant activity, or an exhilarating experience. Others recognized attributes in themselves upon which they had to draw or develop and bring to the educational experience, for example, faith, hope, and determination. Others looked at their participation from a more practical perspective, such as having a strategy, forming partnerships, considering pathways, or working towards self-sufficiency. One participant had the unique perspective of locating her learning experience in a personal hierarchy—the experience being placed behind her role as a mother where family came first. Another participant looked at the AET programme through dubious eyes as he had been experiencing feelings of being overwhelmed, a fear of technology, a lack of

confidence, and a sense of having little choice in participation by the funding agency. Still others yet indicated great frustration with the processes of applying and receiving approval for funding from a government agency to support them in their AET pursuits.

In the following sections, I present participant demographic findings, phenomenographic findings from the combined data from participant interviews and weekly critical incident reports, and my reflexive findings as the researcher.

Participant Demographic Findings

Figure 2 summarizes the demographic information of the 11 participants. I have used pseudonyms for each of the participants labelled A-K in the summary chart. The pseudonyms and corresponding participants shown in Figure 2 are Abbey – A; Bonnie – B; Carl – C; Dan – D; Eva – E; Fedir – F; Gayle – G; Haley – H; Isi – I; Joelle – J; and Kyle – K. This summary is followed by a more detailed description of the participant sample.

In describing the demographic profiles of the 11 participants in this study, 60% of the sample had a marital status of married while 40% had that of single. Fifty-four percent of the sample had children ranging in age from 6 to 35 years whereas 45% did not have children. Nine of the 11 participants had Canadian citizenship, 1 had First Nations' status, and 1 held permanent residency status in Canada. Four of the participants did not have English as their first language; however, they did have varying levels of English as a second language.

All but 1 of the participants had been receiving tuition assistance and/or income assistance from funding agencies of the province of Ontario or government of Canada.

P	G	A	M	C	Z	L	S	F	SES	SCB
A	F	41	S	0	Cdn	ENG	Ontario Women's Directorate	Under-graduate Degree	P/T Self-employed	Visible Minority
B	F	29	S	0	Cdn	SPN	Ontario Women's Directorate	Less than High School Diploma	P/T Employed	LGBT
C	M	18	S	0	Cdn	ENG	Ontario Ministry of Education	Less than High School Diploma	Unemployed Less than 1 yr out of job	Youth with weak attachment to workforce
D	M	43	M	16 13	Cdn	ENG	Employment Ontario	High School Diploma Some College Courses	Unemployed	Displaced Mfg Worker at least 40 years of age
E	F	33	M	0	Cdn	ENG	Employment Ontario	High School Diploma	Unemployed	Displaced Mfg Worker
F	M	24	S	0	Perm. Resid. Status	RUS	Self	High School Diploma	Unemployed	Newcomer with ESL Youth with weak attachment to workforce
G	F	37	M	11 6	Cdn	ENG	Ontario Works	High School Diploma	Unemployed	Social Assistance
H	F	48	S	29	Cdn	ENG FRN	Ontario Works	High School Diploma Some College Courses	Unemployed Less than 1 yr out of a job	Single Mother on Social Assistance
I	F	55	S	35 34 33 29	First Nations	ENG	Ontario Ministry of Education	High School Diploma Some Univer. Courses	Unemployed	Mother returning to school after raising children Canadian Aboriginal
J	F	58	M	21 19	Cdn	FRN	Employment Ontario	Less than High School Diploma	Unemployed	Francophone with ESL Displaced Mfg. Worker at least 40 years of age
K	M	42	M	16	Cdn	ENG	WSIB	High School Diploma	Unemployed	Person with Disability

Legend. P=Participant Pseudonym Label, G=Gender, A=Age, M=Marital Status, C=Children's Ages, Z=Citizenship, L=First Language, S=Programme Sponsor, F=Formal Schooling, SES=Socioeconomic Status, SCB=Socio-cultural Background.

Figure 2. Participant demographic findings.

Two of the participants were part-time employed while participating in their full-time AET programme and the balance was unemployed.

In regard to the level of formal schooling held by each of the participants at the time of the study, 3 held less than a high school diploma, 4 had achieved a high school diploma only, 3 held a high school diploma with some postsecondary courses, and 1 held an undergraduate degree.

The factor that was the most commonly shared among the participants was that of a low socioeconomic status (SES). Nine of the 11 participants deemed themselves unemployed while 2 held part-time jobs, one of which was through self-employment.

The greatest diversity among the sample was that of the participants' sociocultural backgrounds. For the purpose of this study, the descriptors for sociocultural background were determined by a checklist produced by me and provided to the participants for self-identification. Participants were allowed to skip any question on the profile to which they wished not to respond. I used these descriptors for sociocultural background based on commonly recognized sociocultural groups.

Of the 11 participants, 2 represented the sociocultural group of Youth with a Weak Attachment to the Workforce (15-24 years of age according to Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2011). Of these 2 youth, 1 participant also represented the Newcomer to Canada group—a major factor was that he had learned English as a foreign language. One other participant shared the English as a foreign language status as she fell within the sociocultural group of Francophone. In addition, she represented the group of Displaced Manufacturing Workers Over at Least 40 Years of Age. Two other participants shared in this group as well, although 1 of them was

younger than 40 years of age. Two other participants shared sociocultural backgrounds as Recipients of Social Assistance; however, 1 was married with children and 1 was single with one adult dependent. The balance of the sample consisted of one participant representing each of the following sociocultural groups: (a) LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transsexual), (b) Visible Minority, (c) Canadian Aboriginal, and (d) Persons with a Disability.

In summarizing the sample's sociocultural backgrounds, each of the 11 participants represented a major sociocultural group which allowed for the study to be as representative as possible given the small number of participants, which is characteristic of a qualitative study. In the following section, I report the phenomenographic findings of this study.

Phenomenographic Findings

In keeping with a phenomenographic approach, I combined all participant data into an outcome space from which I then formulated four main categories of description. I interpreted these as constituting four qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of the phenomenon of participation in AET programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate. These included: (a) security, (b) engagement, (c) relationship, and (d) competency. In selecting a metaphor to represent these four conceptions, I chose to use the metaphor of voice because it represented the fact that participants either vocalized or presented via text their conceptions of their lived experiences in their AET programmes. Therefore, I presented the findings in terms of the (a) voice of security, (b) voice of engagement, (c) voice of relationship, and (d) voice of competency.

I recognize that the resulting categories of description in this study are considered to be a partial identification of the body of potential qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults report their experience of participation in an AET programme. Marton and Booth (1997) stated, “When the researcher describes the differing ways of experiencing a phenomenon, the researcher is describing the phenomenon, again, no more than partially, from the reports or inferences of the subjects, and it is this partial constitution of the phenomenon that is the researcher’s description” (p. 125).

General understandings I had in forming the four categories of description were that (a) the voice of security constituted experiences related to participants feeling safe and able in the learning environment in order to bring about their stated goals that could provide security for their future, (b) the voice of engagement represented experiences related to participants feeling actively involved in and enjoying the learning process by applying their skills and knowledge, (c) the voice of relationship included experiences related to intrapersonal and interpersonal emotions and thoughts throughout their participation, and (d) the voice of competency pertained to experiences related to how participants saw themselves as a learner or in relation to knowledge in general. Earlier tentative categories that I had considered which either became subsumed under the resulting categories or were not reported in the findings due to a relatively low rate of representation in the data according to my lens, included: (a) dream fulfillment, (b) creativity, (c) emotionality, (d) exploration, (e) spirituality, (f) chance-taking, (g) opportunism, (h) sacrifice, and (i) struggle.

The nature of the constructivist/interpretivist research paradigm assumes that there are multiple realities, according to Guba and Lincoln (2005). Accordingly, the

possibility always exists that qualitative data could be re-sorted in different ways to fit other categories depending on the lens. For example, I reported all findings that related to the difficulties with bureaucratic processes of funding agencies or AET service providers under the category of the voice of security as I interpreted the reported experiences of the participants in this regard as posing a threat to their sense of successfully accessing and completing an AET programme that would ultimately provide security for their future (e.g., a positive labour-market outcome). It is possible that the topic of bureaucracy could alternatively be conceptualized as an independent category of description depending on a particular analyst's lens.

In the following, I present the qualitative findings of this study where I have organized the data by research question and, within each research question, by each of the four categories of description or, in other words, the four qualitatively different ways in which adult learners reported their experiences of participation in AET. These findings are presented as the participants' reported lived experiences in the form of participant responses that I paraphrased or directly quoted from the participants themselves. In the interest of space, I have selected only certain quotes representative of the voices. However, in the summary of phenomenographic findings at the end of this chapter, I have listed as many key concepts as possible that I gleaned from the entire body of combined transcript data.

Motivations for Participation in AET

In this section, I present the phenomenographic findings related to motivations for participation in AET organized by the four categories of description.

Voice of security. By far, the largest group of motivational factors for AET among the participants was related to security and welfare issues. These factors included a desire to take responsibility for oneself in order to be successful, get a job, earn a credential, acquire an education, achieve a high school or college diploma, shape one's future, enhance one's status, utilize available financial support, and study in an efficient and flexible manner.

A motivating factor particularly for Abbey was her recognition that she is the one who has to take responsibility for doing the work and completing the course as she stated, "I'm the only one that's going to keep going." She saw that in order to successfully secure her future by completing the programme, she would need to take responsibility for herself.

Carl was motivated by getting a job as he explained that since dropping out of high school 2 years ago, he "had three jobs in those 2 years ... [I] sat around for a year or 2."

Eva was beginning to realize that employers were requiring a credential; however, she recognized that they were not necessarily asking for a particular kind as she stated, "Half the time they don't even care what it is just so that they can see that you've accomplished something."

Kyle recognized that getting an education is a priority and said he always thought, "If I ever lost my job at the mill, I'd have to get an education to get a job anywhere." Joelle realized that when she lost her job, she would need to finish grade 12 as a minimum prerequisite. She stated, "The kids don't get it; they don't think they need an education, but adults know they need it to get jobs." Dan said, "For peace of mind, the

new job market dictates that you've got to have that high school diploma so you have to at least have that."

Even though he had experience in his field without a diploma, Dan felt that employers would not recognize his experience alone. He said of the value of his experience, "I know that, but the HR people just don't know that." Isi felt motivated by a sense of hope for her future as she stated, "I am going to go somewhere ... I am going to accomplish at the end of it all ... that goal is to find that diploma." Carl was able to see reason in working toward his high school diploma as he said, "Looking to the future, it will help me in the end."

Fedir stated that the main reason for continuing to be motivated to complete his training was that he felt he wanted to move up in life. He expressed his sentiments as, "I want to move up further in my life, grow, and get better jobs in terms of what I do." Haley was also thinking about the pursuit of improved job status as a next step after earning the PSW certificate, as she said, "If you can in a year after taking this course go to school for another year and become a Registered Practical Nurse, wow, look at the jump in pay."

A significant factor in Carl's decision to return to an AET programme was that he would receive financial support from the government. He declared, "Oh yeah, totally, that made me want to come, the money. It had a lot to do with it for sure." Fedir was elated that in addition to financial support from the educational institution itself, the fact that his school was able to break down the tuition payments into smaller chunks, made it much easier to pay than the experience he had had previously at a publicly funded college.

General support from family was a motivating factor for Gayle in addition to government financial assistance from Ontario Works. She proudly stated, “My kids are very supportive. They’re picking up extra duties at home. My husband now is watching the kids on Fridays.” She went on to say, “If I hadn’t got [financial] assistance from Ontario Works, I don’t think I would have done the programme.”

Eva talked favourably about the scheduling of her AET programme and the homework policy especially for those people who have children at home as she commented, “It’s good too if you have kids because you’re not spending all your time at school and he doesn’t give you a lot of homework. He thinks your family should come first.” In addition to a supportive course schedule, Fedir was motivated by a sense that he would have an advantage by being able to complete his programme in a more condensed and efficient timeframe than that which the publicly funded college had to offer. He explained that in the case of the college programme, “They teach it, but it’s so long ... I’m going to finish school soon ... that puts me on the top of the list; it gives me an advantage.”

Voice of engagement. A prime motivation to participate in AET, which became evident from the reported lived experiences of the participants, was to become engaged by doing or feeling something, for example, contributing to the development of a product, applying knowledge via a hands-on experience, enhancing life skills, or avoiding negative emotions such as anger and boredom stemming from a lack of engagement in something.

Bonnie was motivated in continuing in her programme by working toward an outcome of a particular project. She stated, “It would be really sad for me if I just

decided, you know, this is it; I'm done. You know, because I will never be able to be a part of the finished product."

In her weekly journal, Gayle seemed relieved that more practical learning activities were being introduced. She stated, "This week was very different from the rest; we are doing more hands-on work." A similar sentiment was expressed by Isi when she described that a different math teacher who had come in was a better fit as this teacher used a more practical instructional strategy. She said, "I found [she] had a more hands-on approach and I think a lot of us who are mature people need to have that hands-on."

Enhancing skills for everyday life drew in Fedir as he stated that he felt "very motivated to come to class because of the material" that was being taught that week. He said that it was useful "not only at work, but also on an everyday basis in personal life."

Avoiding negative emotions and a sense of non-engagement is what brought Carl to enrol in an AET programme. Upon reflection of the time just prior to getting started into the programme, he said, "I was kind of angry and I was really bored."

Voice of relationship. Another area of interest I detected in the qualitative data was that some participants had strong motivations to participate in an AET programme for factors that revolved around how they felt within themselves and about others. For example, participants were spurred on by the pursuit of personal passion, a yearning for self-actualization, a wish to help oneself, a feeling of pride in one's accomplishments, enjoyment of the connection with supportive peers, a sense of duty to family members, satisfaction in providing for one's family, and a desire to help or care for others.

Abbey appeared to have experienced a high level of internal motivation as she stated, "Even though I got a university degree, it wasn't my passion; it wasn't what I

wanted to be.” Carl also had come to recognize that some motivation had to come from within as he recounted, “If you don’t want to teach yourself and help yourself, then they [teachers] won’t help you.” These statements reflected a deep-seated desire to follow a passion or to self-actualize as opposed to relying on external expectations.

A feeling of pride was a prime motivation for a couple of participants. Dan indicated, “One of the things that motivated me is that it was kind of a pride thing; I had never finished.... For me, I just wanted to finish.” Similarly, Isi said, “I can do this and complete it and [have] the satisfaction of standing up when they say your name and say here is your diploma.” In both cases, motivation came from a desire to feel proud that a course of study was finished or that a diploma was earned this time around.

Support from peers and teachers were identified as a motivating factor. Bonnie expressed gratitude for her peers’ support in “taking great notes while I was absent.” She also appreciated the teachers’ support as she said that she would like to “let them know that everything I know is because of them.”

Relating in a small peer group seemed motivating to Carl. In comparing his experiences in an AET programme to his experiences in high school, he favoured the adult learning context as he described, “In high school it didn’t really work out ... I didn’t really get along with the teachers, but here ... the teachers sit down and work with you.”

Satisfying family members was the biggest motivator for Carl as he recounted, “I was going to get kicked out of my house unless I went back to school or something.” Eva remembered what friends and family had said about postsecondary education, “Why don’t you have education? What’s wrong?” Not only was Carl’s parents’ prompting a key

factor in him enrolling in his programme, but also their ongoing support throughout the programme was important as he explains, “My Dad takes me [to the school] every time he doesn’t work and then the other days I take the city bus.” Appreciating the support of family was also a significant factor in Bonnie’s motivation as she stated, “My parents have been a huge support; they are just happy that I am doing this and they said they would help me in any way they can.” Moreover, a desire to emulate family and friends was another motivating factor for Carl as he said about the return to school by his brother and by a friend, “It was just like a word of mouth thing; my buddy came here and my brother was trying to get his GED.”

As Dan progressed through the AET programme, he was cognizant of a need to care for his family as he indicated that providing for them was a significant motivation in completing this programme. He also felt the need to be a role model for his children. In providing for her family, Isi said, “So I made the right decision ... [Parents] will sacrifice something they are doing for their child. We all do as mothers; that is the instinct we have.”

A significant number of participants described their desire to care for and to help others either once they had completed their AET programme or while in their programme. Gayle’s experience with a relative who was resident in a long-term care facility was her primary motivation to train as a Personal Support Worker. She shared, “I got more hands-on of what consisted of a nursing home and who is the frontline and that helped me make up my mind and what I could really do as a PSW.” Gayle declared, “I need more connection. I have lots to offer people, and I need to do that.” She enthusiastically recounted, “[It’s] intriguing and exhilarating for me that I can make a

difference in these peoples' lives." Haley was similarly motivated as she stated, "I was ready to do something different. I wanted to do something more to give back, to help more and to make a difference." Along this same theme, educating others once she had completed her social services worker goal as a way of helping others seemed to be the motivation of Isi. She reflected, "I am not only helping my own aboriginal people, but I am helping others too." Even while the programme was in session, Isi took particular notice of how others in the class were doing. She commented,

You could see the ones that are really doing well who are much younger than I You could see the ones who ... were of native background and they are really struggling. Even though I could get it really quick, I try to ... help them."

Voice of competency. Another significant concept that I could see in the data was that of competency. Participants were motivated in some ways by pursuing relevant and interesting knowledge, feeling capable as a learner, acquiring greater understanding, learning how to learn, feeling educated, achieving in a field, and improving skills in memory and in reading.

The discernment of the relevance of the learning was a factor in Abbey's motivation. In her journal she expressed, "I am picky about what I am learning. I am not the type to store or learn useless information. If the knowledge is pertinent to my life, I am pretty enthusiastic." Haley felt her programme had really caught her interest. She stated, "It's caught my interest now. I was interested in getting the certificate, with different aspects of it; now I'm learning."

In regard to the achievement of a formal credential and directed to her educational institutions, Abbey stated, “I don’t need the piece of paper. I want to prove to you that I’m better than any paper you can give me.”

Continuing to motivate Fedir was that he was earning good marks which gave him the feeling of being capable. Similarly, Abbey was motivated by her achievement. She stated, “My marks and comprehension are there and for me it’s not even about the marks. It’s about the comprehension regardless if you get 95%.” She went on to say, “You now understand why you’re doing something and you now understand how you can improve on things you’ve been doing in the past.” Gayle was also motivated by the learning itself. She stated, “I like the learning part about it, the things I didn’t know that turned on a light in my head.”

Expressing a sense of enjoyment, Joelle stated, “When you are young, you are going to school because you have to go to school, but when you are older you are going because not only do you have to go to school, but it’s more enjoyable.” Fedir also felt as though he had discovered that he could learn and enjoy it.

Barriers/Challenges to Participation in AET

In this section, I present the phenomenographic findings related to barriers and challenges to participation in AET organized by the four categories of description.

Voice of security. A significant level of reported lived experiences of the participants in relation to barriers fell into the category of security. Security issues were identified as those being related to participants not feeling emotionally safe or factors that could affect their completion of the programme where they saw completing as being a benchmark for securing their future. The issues revolved around lack of finances while

in school, poor job loss adjustment support, onerous funding application processes, lack of responses from the labour market, disorganized or upsetting classroom dynamics, and readjusting to a lower income level.

Bonnie had cause to reflect on her participation at times as she said, “I could be making so much more money right now working with my company [rather] than being here.” It appeared that the biggest challenge or barrier to her and one that she was trying to overcome, was that of needing to work outside of the full-time AET programme to earn some wages. She stated, “I am very happy to be in this programme even though they don’t pay me [but] I have to work part time.”

Dan described that his employer whose company was closing provided some support in the form of a job bank as well as an interview training service, but he did not feel that was enough. He thought that the company should have brought in a representative from the Employment Insurance office to explain the process of filing for benefits. Dan found himself suddenly faced with trying to understand and navigate the rules to qualify for government funding for an AET programme.

Dan also recalled the high demand for the Second Career funding from Employment Ontario at the time as he described the morning of his information session and the frustration that he experienced in that “they had to keep bringing in chairs. There must have been about 300 people there.... It takes you 8 weeks just to get in to that.” He believed that if it had not been for his political tactics that he would not have been as successful getting started into retraining as quickly as he did. He recalled that a Second Career funding counsellor told him he would not be able to start school until June. He lamented, “I freaked; that was another 6 weeks away. I called my MP and he pulled a

few strings and pushed it through for me [saying] the whole point is to get this guy back into work.” Similarly, Joelle concurred when she said, “If you don’t push, the government is not going to give you what you want ... you keep on going and calling them and asking them.”

Eva also experienced the criteria for qualifying for funding to be daunting in that there was an expectation on behalf of the funding agency that she contribute to the cost of her textbooks for the AET programme. She recalled, “I wouldn’t get accepted to school because I was asking them to pay for all my books.” She also felt that the funding counsellor spoke down to her as she remembered the counsellor saying, “I don’t have to recommend you, you know.”

Fedir expressed that a significant barrier for him was his ineligibility to access funding from the Ontario government. When he became aware of the Second Career initiative, he investigated it to discover that he was not eligible as one had to have been laid off from a job within a certain timeframe. Fedir had in fact been laid off, but it was from a temporary placement agency where he had been working. He was surprised and disappointed to learn that even though he had been working for a company through the placement agency, he did not have eligibility under the Employment Insurance guidelines, hence, was not eligible for Second Career assistance. He also indicated that since immigrating to Canada, the only financial assistance he was able to get was a loan from the Ontario Student Assistance Plan for his prior public college programme even though he had previously worked for several years in Canada.

This process of applying for government funding to attend an AET programme appeared not only to be about having the persistence to go through all of the steps, but

also having a certain skill in communications and in navigating the subjective responses of the funding agency counsellors at times.

Another source of challenge for participants was the understanding of what the labour market had to offer. Dan reflected, “It’s not your typical job market out there, so where do you go? Manufacturing in general is dead.” Kyle expressed his lack of knowledge about how to choose an appropriate career field as he explained, “When you’re given a book and you get all these different fields ... and they give you a couple weeks to pick 20 and say okay, and you don’t know nothing about any of them ... it’s hard to do.” He experienced a feeling of being coerced into an education plan by the funding agency to retrain for the teaching field when he believed that the field was stagnating. He said, “It’s hard to be motivated when I know I’m probably going to go through 4 years and end up at a Mike’s Mart somewhere because I won’t be able to find a job.” He went on to say, “I cannot see how they could say, oh yeah, there’ll be a need for teachers in 4 years; I just don’t believe them.”

To Dan, the lack of response to his resume was disheartening at times as he reflected, “You just kind of get a little discouraged because I put in for so many jobs and I’m not hearing a lot back and the worst part is, I have got a good resume.” In his weekly journal, he stated, “I have now applied for well over 125 positions in 5 months and only three interviews; still pretty depressing out there.” He eased his anxiety a little when he reasoned, “I have still that safety net that my severance will take me to June and then I get Pogie and stuff like that so if I’ve got to take just a filler job, it won’t be so bad.”

Eva claimed that the lack of employer support in securing a co-operative education placement was a barrier when she stated, “I am calling companies and trying to get their information.... That was hard because a lot of people don’t want to talk to you.”

Fedir described that in his experience, some teachers “tighten up the bolts so hard.” An example he gave was a teacher’s denial that he could leave the classroom when he was feeling that he needed a break. He experienced this as too tight of a classroom policy which left him with a sense of feeling insecure that he would not be able to alleviate his need for a break when he needed one. Gayle experienced the classroom routines as a little disorganized for her expectations. In one of her journal reflections she shared, “We do a lot of story-telling and off track a lot.” She also indicated that not getting marks back in a timely manner contributed to her feeling doubtful about her readiness to begin her work training placement.

A challenge to Haley was the requirement that she find her own community placement for part of the work experience component of her programme. She described, “You’re doing it while you’re taking full-time and doing so many tests and assignments.” This requirement contributed to her insecure sense that she would not be successful at getting a placement.

Gayle found that a challenge for her was that “the long-term hours at extended care is from 6 to 2. And that is going to be a barrier for me. My girls have got to get up to get to school.” This left her insecure as to how she would manage the schedule of the programme in conjunction with that of her children. Another deterrent for her was the course requirement to speak in front of her classmates. She said, “If you don’t come out of your comfort zone, then you can’t experience it. It’s just another hurdle you have to

get over.” She went on to say, “We had Communications before the PSW part and it’s a lot of getting in with your feelings and in with your comfort zone and a lot of people really don’t want to do that.”

Making the transition from working at a full-time job to attending school at the same time as receiving income support, posed the challenge for Isi to readjust to her smaller budget. She recounted, “I was making quite a bit more money than I am now. So it is a matter of relooking at my budget and saying, now you can do this but you can’t do that.” Similarly, Joelle described, “It was like you wanted something when you had a big salary so you went and got it, and now you can’t.”

Voice of engagement. A significant area of challenge for some participants was related to the need to be actively engaged in their learning either in a physical way or in a mental way or in other words, being able to apply the skills and knowledge being acquired.

Carl expressed that a barrier for him would typically be a situation where he “just couldn’t sit behind a desk or anything like that.” Gayle expressed the same sentiment when she said, “We are doing a lot of book theory right now, and it is frustrating to a lot of us in the class ... we want to get our hands dirty.” Fedir found that he was distracted when trying to read and expressed his difficulty with focusing. He explained, “Let’s say you read in the book ... it was difficult. I had to read it twice instead of once. If I had been in the quiet room, nobody’s bothering me, no noises, I would just read it once.”

Eva felt a barrier to her was the inflexibility of the government funding agency to allow students to finish the computer skill component faster if in fact they could do so. She said that she would have liked to have called the agency to say, “I’m done my

course. Can I leave and get back working?” This represented to Eva that she was being held back by this rule in becoming re-engaged in a job where she was now ready to apply her skills.

Voice of relationship. In the area of relationship, I saw some participants’ focus was on challenges to one’s self-esteem and/or to one’s relationship with others. This voice included emotions and thoughts of an intrapersonal or interpersonal nature. The experiences around relation to self and relation to others served sometimes to detract attention from participants’ focus on their course of study.

Kyle alluded to feeling awkward about his more mature age studying in the field of teaching at a university. He stated, “I’m going to be feeling like the old fart there.” Also, Dan said, “At my age, you are starting to think about slowing down now and you’re making plans for that second part of your career.” Abbey similarly said, “[I was] hoping they wouldn’t rule me out because of my age [41] and saying ‘you know what; you’re too old for this programme’ Will I be able to withstand whatever they were throwing at me?” Along with age, Gayle experienced a myriad of fears including her ability, her responsibilities to her family, the schedule of hours, and her study skills. She asked herself, “Can I do this? Are they all going to be younger than me? I have a husband and two kids relying on me. What are the hours going to be like? Will I be able to study again?” Kyle at times felt uncomfortable asking for help from his teacher. He described, “There is no privacy ... especially mature students because it’s embarrassing to them that maybe they’re not as smart as some of these other kids.” There was also embarrassment about personal circumstances as Gayle expressed anxiety about being judged if anyone in

her cohort found out that she had gotten government funding. She was concerned that people might think she was getting a free ride.

Carl found that of any challenges he had experienced along the way, negative interpersonal relations stood out, as he recalls, “Stubborn people that thought they knew everything and people that let people down.” As time went along, Gayle also became concerned about the negative interpersonal relations that occasionally ensued among the students as she stated, “They are set in their ways and one classmate might be stronger than another and they just sit there and take it.” She described her concern about what she was observing about the mannerisms of this one particular classmate that “she’s constantly sighing or rubbing her head ... she’s walking in all hung over. It just takes away from the whole experience of learning.” Eva experienced herself as a quick learner in relation to some of the other students in the class and, as a result, found it difficult to study with them. She pointed out that the problem was due to their apparent lower literacy level. She said, “When I read, I comprehend and lots of people read and they don’t comprehend.”

Voice of competency. How participants related to the concept of their own level of competency was evident as they described barriers and challenges to participation. These included competency issues about the learning they were involved in or thought was expected of them, and the taking of entrance exams and/or assessments for course work.

Joelle remembered a high level of apprehension as she reflected, “I didn’t know what it was going to be like It is a challenge though, I mean you’re being put into a new class and you have to learn all those new things.” Fedir felt the same as he said, “I

was concerned I wouldn't be able to keep up with this programme ... with the workload, with the grades, with everything."

Also worried at the outset, Dan recalled, "I was getting nervous about the entrance exam, what I would have to study for to pass it and everything." Similarly, Fedir feared taking the entry test. He recalled his anxiety as he described, "I end up my nose bleeding; I guess my blood pressure increased so much." Eva talked also about the expectation of having to have an English and math assessment. She expressed trepidation at first, but then was pleasantly surprised at how easy the assessment was. She characterized her feelings at the time as, "I'm horrible, horrible, horrible with numbers. I was nervous about that, but it was like grade 2 all over again." Preparing for the mature student English and mathematics assessment to qualify to enter a college programme also caused Isi some anxiety. She reflected, "I can't use a calculator and I can't use a cheat sheet.... I wouldn't mind having seen that mature student test.... So now I got to prepare myself for that."

Although Isi recognized that the teacher was an expert in his field, she found that he would explain things too quickly. She reflected, "He will do it real quick and you will try to follow because you don't want to seem stupid."

Carl experienced his low literacy as a challenge as he explains, "[While] working in the electrical shop I am good, but reading these books around here ... I will read a paragraph and answer questions and I don't even remember what I just read." Similarly, Fedir spoke about his language barrier saying, "I wouldn't say it's that significant that it stops me from getting my diploma [but] it makes it hard." Also, the main challenge for Joelle was her English proficiency being a Francophone.

Isi found it a challenge simply returning to school as an adult. She stated, “After being out of school for 37 years, it is a little hard getting back into the study scheme ... it was the concept of picking up the information on that paper and understanding the math problems.” Carl found math challenging too. He stated, “I remember subtraction, multiplication, division, and adding and all of that stuff. Something like the pi theorem, like trigonometry and all of that; I just kind of get lost.” Joelle noted how different the mathematics field had become as she said, “Right now it’s all metric.... When I was going to school, there was no such thing; it was all the imperial system.”

Dan indicated that he thought his low computer skills would be a negative factor in his ability to find a job. He said, “Although I had very work-related computer skills, what I found when I was doing my research and looking at 10,000 job ads, was my biggest concern being Excel [and] PowerPoint.”

Dan was always looking for new strategies in his job search. He had a sense that he should be prepared with all the skills that a particular position would demand as he explained, “There’s software there that those people use that I haven’t that I have sort of used that I want at least some exposure to.” He found that another challenge was that of the specificity of jobs being posted. Not only was specificity a hurdle, but employers appeared to be asking for the world in terms of knowledge and experience.

Needs Being Met in AET

Participants expressed what needs of theirs were being met in their respective AET programmes. The following are their distinct voices.

Voice of security. Many of the needs expressed by the participants were related to security issues. The need to earn a credential was identified by Bonnie as she said, “I

have experienced a lot and I have been to school and stuff [but] I don't have a piece of paper saying I did this." She also said, "It's going to bring to you pretty much a career or something at the end of it." Dan saw the credential as being security for his future, too. He stated, "I needed to know that I would get a diploma. I need the security of it.... I needed to know that I would have something waiting for me in the future, too, you know."

The quality of the credential was important to Haley as she researched other PSW programmes and said, "The certification I'll have, the training I'll have done by the time I'm done with this fast track course, is superior to any of the other courses here."

Joelle felt that her needs were being met in terms of the financial assistance she was receiving which she claims was the highest amount allowable. Financial support was also a need of Carl which he was getting to take the trades exploration programme. Meeting her need for a programme that was accessible to her, Eva reflected that she would not have been in a position to relocate to attend one of the college programmes as she stated, "I can't go to all those colleges." She claimed that she was not prepared in her mind for it as she stated, "I was so used to where I was living that I didn't—wasn't ready to—move to Toronto."

Voice of engagement. Bonnie indicated that she needed to apply her learning and that indeed she was getting experience of a hands-on nature. Gayle also had a need for a practical instructional style as she stated after doing poorly on a test, that her teacher "explained with more day-to-day examples" then she said, "We like learning it that way and we passed."

Carl in his trades exploration programme stated, “I want to be able to wire up my own electrical stuff one day and just like some general knowledge, unless I figure out if that is what I want to do for the rest of my life.”

Voice of relationship. Gayle felt that the programme was meeting her “need to have my adult person back, to communicate with adults, and just have my own time.”

She further declared, “My needs are to be educated enough to help the elderly. I need assurance that I am using all of my abilities to keep them safe.” Gayle further added that

my needs are to be educated enough to help the elderly. I need assurance that I am using all of my abilities to keep them safe and to just be a role model for my girls so they can say, you know, my mom’s a PSW; just a boost for me and a boost for them.

Carl found that his interpersonal relations were improving. After he reflected on a few arguments he had had with a fellow classmate previously, he declared, “The programme is helping my skills to deal with other people and learn how to deal with people who have different personalities.”

Voice of competency. Several participants described needs being met as they related to their sense of or level of competency. Abbey said, “Where I’m at right now, all my needs are being met because I’m understanding what I’m learning and it’s answered my questions on what I had before I entered the programme that my other past instructors couldn’t teach me.” Similarly, Fedir indicated that he felt that he had gained a better understanding of the field within which he had previously worked. He stated, “After this course, I have a better understanding of what I was doing in that environment. Isi, in focusing on a particular aspect of her mathematics curriculum, stated, “My need is to

understand the exponents.... I can get this stuff as long as I see it visually.” Carl believed he got out of the programme the things for which it was intended such as it “gave you basic knowledge about the three trades.” Bonnie recognized that she had learned how to learn. She would now consider continuing her education at university whereas before she indicated she had some fear about further education as she stated, “I’ve decided to ... continue my education after this. It’s perfect because now I have pretty much set myself out to learn, how to learn.” Dan was surprised that even though he had set out with a credential in mind, he discovered, “I didn’t think I needed the education that went with it.”

Needs Not Being Met in AET

Although many needs were being met in the AET programmes, according to the participants, there were some that had been expected, but were not being met. The following looks at these.

Voice of security. The need for financing for Carl to continue his trades exploration programme toward an apprenticeship was not being met. He expressed, “After this course, I could get an apprenticeship programme and go to school here, but it costs like \$9,000 and I would have to get a loan from the government.” Gayle found her need for predictability was not being met as she described her surprise at having been reminded well into the programme that they were to be wearing medical scrubs since the beginning of the programme. As she put it, “Wearing scrubs from the get-go.... It wasn’t in our contract.”

An area where Kyle felt he was not getting his needs met was in the scheduling of the teachers in his self-study programme. He explained that even though he is required to

be in attendance at least 25 hours per week, when he is there, there is not always a teacher in attendance for the curriculum he is studying. He said:

These teachers have strange hours and a lot of times they don't coincide with the students that are doing their course ... if I have a problem, I'm hoping that the teacher is there that day and they always do their best to help you out.... It's not their fault; they get their hours cut so bad ... it doesn't work for the learner ... it's a funding issue.

Voice of engagement. One of the areas in which a need of Fedir remained unfulfilled was that of a co-operative education placement which he believes could have helped in securing a job. He stated, "You're not professional in getting a job, you're a professional in doing your job." Exemplifying this point further, Gayle stated,

I think a lot of us want to get out to do the clinical and to do more hands-on stuff. We are really biting at the nails to get out there and learn because I don't think you learn a lot in the books.

Haley was frustrated with the fact that one of the online components of the programme, a mini-certificate which was mandatory to complete, was not available when students had the class time to do it due to the website being under construction.

Voice of relationship. A concern that appeared not to have been managed to Gayle's satisfaction was that of a classmate's disruptive behaviour. She described, "There is one classmate that is always rolling her eyes and breathing heavy when she is unhappy with the way the class is heading.... I expressed my feelings to the teacher." Joelle, although engaged in her AET programme to help her enhance knowledge and skills for a new job, responded to the question about whether her needs were being met

and traced back to her experience of the treatment by her employer at the time of lay-off. She commented, “There’s not, ah, much caring there. The only thing they care about is to make money... you are expendable, and go find something else to do in the meantime.”

Voice of competency. Haley felt that her need for a reasonable pace was not being met when a significant amount of the curriculum was trying to be covered in a short time. She felt that the organization of the curriculum could have been planned better in order to avoid this situation. She stated, “It’s shoving the onus on us to perform and some of us are okay with it and some are not ... we lost two [people] in just the last week.”

One of the needs Kyle felt was not being met was getting prepared well enough in computer skills for what he would be expected to do in university. He expressed his concern to the funding agency hoping that they would supply him with a laptop computer and voice-activation software, sooner than later, but out of frustration he said,

I told them and they keep saying the same thing, ‘You’ve got to wait until you finish this.’ Well by that time, I’m already starting university.... They hold back everything until it’s too late and then they wonder why we struggle.

Academic Growth in AET

Participants were asked to reflect on how they believed they had grown in an academic sense since they began their AET programme. The following presents their responses.

Voice of security. Dan realized through his learning activities that he is the one who has to take responsibility. He said, “You can’t just talk the talk, you’ve got to walk the walk ... you know what, nobody is going to do this for you.”

Eva appreciated that her teacher was helping her in preparing for a job as she explained, “He has given us a lot to learn, like, a lot of information on what it is going to be like for us to get back in the workforce and helping us with our resumes.”

Voice of engagement. Abbey talked about the improvement in her applied knowledge which was very different from her previous academic work at university. She recounts, “I learned a ton...I totally learned a whole new sector of knowledge. I think I’ve used my engineering twice ... this is all, again, practical; it’s all applied.”

Carl experienced that when the lessons were most relevant to the trades, he valued them more as he stated, “The knowledge in the course, to do with the trades, that was all good.” Having learned about the framing trade was where Carl saw his interest and growth as he said in his weekly journal, “I was excited to start framing on Monday; it is great. Honestly, now I love coming in for framing; I love it. I wouldn’t really care if I wasn’t getting paid right now.”

Voice of relationship. In her journal, Abbey shared that although she was uncomfortable with some classmates’ attitudes, she questioned her role in the conflict in whether she was respecting others’ views in the way in which they would like when she reflected, “I know I have a very dominant presence and a high demand to do things my way. So, I am learning how I make this work respecting the other person as well as my learning.” Haley felt her expanded understanding would help her to become more empathetic because “if you see how a problem was created and why that is a problem, then it isn’t as hard to solve and the shock value isn’t very big. You are more liable to be empathetic and kinder I think.”

Abbey said:

You're meeting a lot of the people who[m] you might be using in your portfolio for the trades. You might be needing those connections through the people you're in the class with. So there's tons of networking that's going on even here.

Isi felt that her growth was related to how she could encourage others. "If someone came up to me ... to say they wanted to go back to school or I don't know what to do or where to start, then I could tell them. Look, here is what I did."

Kyle felt he had grown in his recognition of the importance of having a positive attitude when he said, "Oh you've got to have a good attitude. If you don't have the right attitude, you're just wasting everybody's time as far as I'm concerned."

Voice of competency. Early in her programme, Bonnie indicated that she felt she had improved not only in math, but also in reading. She characterized her academic growth as, "When I came into the math, I didn't know how to render a tape properly. Coming out of the programme, I have progressed a lot.... I never used to read, but now I read a lot." Fedir also felt he had improved upon his reading speed and his understanding of text. He said, "I was starting to read faster; my reading speed increased." Isi responded to the question of her academic growth by saying, "I am smart in math....I know more about math now than I did a year ago." She recognized that the learning of math is simply a progression as she said, "Each chapter depends upon that chapter being understood and done and then go to the next one."

The GED preparation programme being partly self-directed would contribute to the development of his self-study skills as Carl described, "Basically, you are just working on your own, and you have like books with questionnaires and math questions

and things like that, but you can ask for help if you need to.” Fedir also saw himself building his study and time management skills which he claimed were good transferable skills. Kyle also felt that he had grown in his independent study abilities which he felt would serve him well in university.

Dan mentioned his academic growth in one of his weekly journals when he said, “By using all the technical terminology and learning all the planning that goes on behind the scenes in Supply Chain, I am at a much higher level than when I began.” Joelle indicated how much she was learning as she stated, “I know I need to improve a lot more, but my comprehension in it is way, way bigger than it used to be.”

Fedir felt as though he had discovered that he could learn and enjoy it. In a subsequent interview, Haley was finding that academically, she was flourishing. She took pride in her achievement of high marks and attributed this to her more mature age.

Isi expected that the curriculum in her high school upgrading course would prepare her in some way for her intended college study. Likewise, Joelle acknowledged, “[They] show you how to do a test, how to write an essay, how to do all those things you are going to need higher up in school.” Kyle has been spurred on by the fact that he recognizes that he needs the university-level grade 12 prerequisites.

Joelle had become more resourceful about her learning as a result of English being a foreign language to her. She described, “It helps you to be more resourceful because, okay, if you don’t find it over here, you have to go deeper.”

Kyle had grown academically as he proudly stated, “I’ve worked hard, a lot harder than I used to have to work.” In describing his persistence he said, “I’ll take it

home and throw it at the wall a few times, but I still end up picking it up and trying to do the best I could do even if I get frustrated.”

Personal Growth in AET

In this section, I present the phenomenographic findings related to personal growth in AET organized by the four categories of description

Voice of security. Joelle mentioned several qualities that she felt she had drawn upon in order to meet the demands of her AET programme. These consisted of persistence, responsibility, and adaptability. She described, “You have to be willing to put the time in and do the work. If you don’t, you are not getting into the programme.... Most people just try and then when it gets hard, they quit.” Similarly, Abbey reflected, “[I am] taking full initiative and responsibility in whatever comes out of what I’m doing.” Carl also recognized his perseverance when he said, “So while I am here, I am just going to come in here and hammer down on it and get my GED.”

Voice of engagement. Abbey valued the growth in her skills in the plumbing trade as she could use them in her personal life. She said, “I am working on my kitchen faucet this weekend to try and fix it. Today, we installed toilets and laundry tubs the correct way. What a difference having this knowledge.”

Voice of relationship. Abbey stated, “My perspective of myself has become stronger.... I know I have value and I’ve seen my value from being here.” Although she had been self-conscious of her age in comparison to the others in her cohort, Haley seemed relieved when she realized that “age is just a number and they see you more as just another student taking the course as opposed to ... that old woman ... why is she doing that?”

Bonnie felt as though she was making a sacrifice in terms of time with family and friends. She stated, “I figure I only need to sacrifice a little more and then take some time off from work back to my regular 1-1/2 days a week.”

In terms of relationships, Carl emphasized his growth as he reflected, “[Taking the programme] made me more open to different people and stuff; like, if you look in our class, there are a lot of different people with different lives.” Fedir also felt that his relationship skills had broadened and his maturity had increased as he found himself as a young adult in the midst of classmates of varying ages.

Voice of competency. In commenting on her personal growth, Bonnie said that because of the leadership activity she had to assume as part of the curriculum, “People, they respected me.”

In terms of subjective experiences of personal growth, Abbey stated, “I’m ready to take risks I wasn’t ready to take before.” She also felt herself become more resourceful as she said, “It’s given me the tools to know if you have a question, where to look.” Self-determination was a factor for Isi as she reflected, “There were a few times in January to the end of June I wanted to quit ... No ... I am not going to be defeated.”

Fedir reflected that the programme was helping him to get his brain working—to develop his memory. In terms of personal growth, he saw himself building his study and time management skills which he believed were valuable transferable skills.

Value of Formal AET

The researcher explained to participants what was meant by the term formal AET in that it denoted a structured programme with a curriculum set out by educational staff

with formal assessments and which results in the earning of a recognized credential. The participants had the following to say about how they valued formal AET.

Voice of security. Carl valued his opportunity to be working toward his GED and the completion of his trades exploration programme. He was mainly thinking that the achievement of the GED was an end point in his education. He appeared to equate the GED with college and university in the sense that all represented to him too much classroom work as opposed to practical-oriented learning. He stated, “I am pretty sure that once I am done my GED, I am done school forever.”

Also looking at AET as a means to an end, Isi saw the value of her programme to her in terms of helping her to meet a postsecondary goal as she stated, “You start looking up to college and universities wherever it is going to go. Then, you are the one who is disciplining yourself in order to get to the end, to the goal.” Fedir believed that a credential of some kind would prove one’s worth as he said, “When you actually pull the diploma and show them the basic proof ... it means a lot; they’re worth hiring.”

Dan believed that formal adult education is helpful and a certain amount is necessary, but does not see it being a panacea, as he stated:

I think that formal education is always going to help you if you have got your Masters or Ph.D., but there is an area in there where your degree isn’t relevant ... but I think you have to have the college now; you have to have the formal.

Seeing AET in terms of meeting a need, Eva indicated, “Since I’ve lost my job, I totally think that if you’re an adult and you need to go back to school, one of these colleges is good.” Isi also felt that returning to school as an adult was a matter of having a pressing need. She stated, “I didn’t have a pressing need at that time.”

Joelle believed that formal AET addressed needs of people to improve their life circumstances as it allowed people to avoid going onto welfare. She iterated, “Now they have a chance to improve [their] life. If they didn’t have this, they wouldn’t have any chance for improvement and the only other option is welfare which most people won’t go on unless they are totally desperate.” In further reflecting on the value of formal AET and that it is valuable only to an extent, Dan believed that AET needs to be targeted to be effective as he commented, “I am finding yes, the formal education is helping, but once I am in that group, now I am finding I am just like the other 50 people—everybody that’s putting in for the job—they all have it.” He likens his educational journey to putting together pieces of a puzzle as he claims, “I am confident that it is just one small piece that’s going to get me over.... Okay, I don’t have the purchasing piece, but I’ve got the logistics and the other piece.” It could also be viewed as a stepping stone to a better job as he stated, “I was working at an entry level and I didn’t know how to move up, and the only way to move up is get education.”

One of the areas for which Carl valued his AET programme was the teacher support that he received. He described his teachers as “very informative and if you need help with anything they are always there.... I know some went out of their way to help some students get a job.” Fedir also found that his programme was valuable in the sense that you have the direct teacher support if you need help in understanding the material.

Voice of engagement. Bonnie saw it as an opportunity to explore a potential new career. She stated, “I left high school at a very young age.... Before, people would have one career and stick with it even if it was boring and paid well, but now adults have the opportunity to go back and try whatever they want.”

Abbey also saw her experience as an opportunity for career exploration as she stated, “The thing is, you’ll know by the second or third year, before you go into the advanced course for apprenticing and finally getting your paper and writing that test, [that] this [is] where you want to be.”

Dan gives an example of the value to him as he wrote in his journal, “This week, I was engaged mostly by even more new career paths that I can explore. Week by week, and chapter by chapter, I am learning of fields that I did not even know existed.”

In recognizing what could be learned from others, Gayle stated, “A lot of experiences have been brought to the table.... I could learn from the older people in the class. And sometimes I could learn from them because they’ve made common sense mistakes.”

Abbey indicated that she believed the value in formal education for her was the practical nature of learning in a workplace setting. She expressed, “One of the systems I have always liked ... is co-op style learning.... All that time you’re applying the practical with what you’re learning in the book ... there’s huge value in this.”

When asked about his interest in pursuing an apprenticeship, Carl stated, “I would, but just not like coming into a classroom and sitting there.... I can’t see myself going to college or university.... I just like working with my hands.” Gayle also saw her PSW programme as a vehicle to feel engaged with her learning. She said, “I can’t feel stagnated, I can’t do the repetitive job.”

Dan was grappling with the value of a credential vs. experience where he suggested that some employers would not require the credential if a person has experience in the field. Exemplifying he said, “Even though I don’t have the purchasing

[certificate] in their world they will say, well do you really need it because you have been doing it for 10 years?” Appearing to favour a programme where the credential includes practical experience to that of an undergraduate degree, he stated, “I think the role that colleges play and private schools and training play is going to be far more beneficial than that B.A.... What am I going to do with that? [Employers will ask] ... have you worked? No.”

Dan drew the example from an employer in that when “she is looking to hire, she looks at the schooling, but puts more weight on the experience.” As Fedir was a newcomer to Canada, one particularly salient value of formal AET for him was that he could get Canadian experience as an immigrant. This was important as he related, “When you come in and you’re trying to get a job, people ask [if you] have a Canadian experience.”

Voice of relationship. Isi valued the sense of camaraderie as she believed that a face-to-face programme allowed for learning from and along with other people. She said, “The thing is you are drawn to each other’s experiences or they may be similar.” Abbey also appreciated her AET programme in that “it’s a smaller class and everybody is making that effort to help each other.” This camaraderie could be viewed in the context of peer competition as Abbey saw the value of her AET programme as not being as competitive as other types of learning environments. She described, “The class size is a lot smaller; it’s more intimate. For whatever reason, there isn’t the same competitiveness and cutthroat competitiveness like in university.” She went on to say, “We’re all here to work together and if you don’t get something, talk to me or talk to this person. You want

to study together; it's just a totally different atmosphere compared to university in that respect."

Eva was valuing her family's needs when she mentioned that the scheduling of her AET programme and the homework policy were positives for those people who have children at home as she commented, "It's good, too, if you have kids because you're not spending all your time at school and he doesn't give you a lot of homework. He thinks your family should come first." Similarly, Gayle was thinking of others' needs when she stated, "I am just thirsty for knowledge and learning more and how I can better people."

Kyle was relating to a feeling of pride within himself at being a mature student when he explained, "At our grad, like they get the MPs and everything; everybody really appreciates mature students finishing." Carl had come to the realization that if he were to give up on himself, he perceived that others would give up on him. He explains, "I would advise anyone that has been in my position to do it and to just try and help [himself/herself] because ... you are just giving up and people are going to give up on you."

Voice of competency. Fedir believed that the quality of learning would be higher in a formal programme as he stated, "When you're learning on your own, you don't have that benefit and the quality of education suffers." Isi similarly expressed that the model of self-study with teacher supervision was limited in her opinion. She explains, "Self-study, whether you come in here 5 days a week and sit here from 9:00 to 3.30, you probably learn maybe 60% of what you are supposed to learn. It should be 85% or more."

Rationale for Low Participation in AET

In this section, I present the phenomenographic findings related to the rationale for a low participation rate in the formal AET system as perceived by the study participants and organized by the four categories of description

Voice of security. Gayle believed that some adults may not possess the common sense necessary to seek out the knowledge that could help them. She expressed, “If people don’t have common sense, it’s hard for people to get their book knowledge.” She emphasized the role of individual responsibility in educating oneself as she stated, “We’re talking about choices you make and if you’re not willing to go out and make a difference in your life—you’re happy with what you’ve got—that’s a choice you’ve made.”

Joelle noted that some people do not realize the connection between education and a career. She stated, “You realize you will never be able to move up the ladder ... you’re never going to be the owner; you’re going to be the guy doing the dishes in the end.” Similarly, Isi suggested that adults may not project into the future the impact of further education as she expressed, “I think the thing is where would you see yourself in 5 years from now if you went back to school?”

Joelle believed adults do not access AET because of a lack of awareness of acceptable options. Dan spoke of his laid-off colleagues at the plant in that, “I don’t think they knew how to look [for job training].”

Joelle believed in some cases there is an element of lack of self-responsibility and apathy. She stated, “Others think that if they don’t have an education, the government

can pay them to stay home.” Eva’s perspective on why the undereducated are not participating in formal AET is “that older adults don’t like change. They hate change.”

Isi believed that some people just want to complete their high school or college programme and do not want to think about schooling again as she stated,

It seems like a lot of people want to finish high school or their college or whatever and later on they tend to think that they could never go back to school again and that’s unfortunate to think that way.

From a more practical perspective, Bonnie stated, “People need to pay their bills and right now they will take money over education. You have responsibilities and money is very important and it’s very hard for someone to take time off.” Dan stated similarly of his laid-off peers, “There is room for them to expand; they could go be a welder.... Not everybody has the time to do this, even financially be able to. You want to, but you can’t.” He went on to say, “I think it’s mostly financial, because I think a lot of people would like to go back, especially because it’s free. Even people with my seniority, that have similar packages, they’re not doing it.”

Bonnie alluded to the choice of attending an AET as a sacrifice when she commented, “It’s a sacrifice that if you don’t have the support behind you, then you know it literally is sacrificing like you/your life.”

A further reflection on why undereducated adults are not pursuing training that is available is that they perceive accessing funding and getting approval to be too complicated. Fedir observed others trying to access government funding for self-employment and said, “One of my relatives was trying to open a business.... And it’s like it’s a big, big, big test you have to go through. Then even if they

qualify you, they still torture you in different kinds of questions.” Another example was that he knew someone accessing the Second Career initiative and said, “It’s so difficult to get it; she just gave up.”

When asked about whether employers should be more involved, Bonnie stated, “I think that companies need to offer more support.” She felt there is a need to “find companies with motivated sponsors to get out there and help with all of this stuff.”

Gayle was insightful in her conclusion that choosing to pursue adult education is a complex decision saying, “There are so many things that are weighing on people’s decisions; it’s not black and white.”

Voice of engagement. In reflecting on why he felt that undereducated adults are not accessing formal AET programmes as would be expected, Fedir said, “They think “I’m going to go again; I’m going to fail.... I was afraid for if it was not going to work for me; I’m going to waste my money; I’m going to waste my time.”

Isi suggested that she felt a concern of adults is that of overcoming inertia in starting into a programme. She described, “Once you get into it and once you start getting over the stumbling blocks and then it starts to pick up and then you become more decided. I think that’s what happened to me.” Likewise, Bonnie said, “It’s just like going to the gym; the hardest part about going to the gym is getting there. Once you get there and see your surroundings, you know you’re going to be ok.”

Gayle believed that age is a factor in choosing not to continue learning in a formal way as she stated, “I think a lot of older people don’t want to learn. I think a lot of people think I have had my kids and there is no sense of me going out and trying to learn.”

Kyle saw the importance of adult students being engaged by their teachers. He declared, “Teachers must be easy going ... if they don’t have that, they ain’t going to work out here because the students will eat them for breakfast.”

Voice of relationship. Abbey in speaking about why more adults don’t participate in AET responded that she believed some adults have a sense of low self-esteem. She described, “It’s almost like if you don’t have the 80% in the academia world, where do you get that support—that encouragement that you’re ok.... How have you encouraged those people to go further?”

Dan thought participation was a function of a person’s age. He stated, “If you are talking to [people] between the ages of 30 and 45, they are likely to reeducate. The older guys are like I’m 53, so who’s going to hire me?”

Bonnie seemed to suggest that there is an element of uncertainty and perhaps even fear that undereducated adult learners have about participating in a formal AET programme. Dan also alluded to some being intimidated and perhaps feeling disconnected from education now. He stated, “I think the older people are intimidated especially because they didn’t go to college in the first place.... They even feel more separated.” Fedir suggested that people need to have self-awareness to stem a fear of failing before they decide to take training. He believed, “If there was a way for people to try themselves in a different place and different opportunities even just by volunteering, it could raise the rate of people going back to school ... try to discover first of all who they are.”

Voice of competency. Some adults may not be interested in AET programmes because they have not experienced the rewards of learning. Gayle felt that if they only

could try it, they would realize what the rewards are. She explained, “I think if they knew—like, you read a book, take the test and learn—and it’s just the boost you get too just from passing.”

For others, it may be a perception that learning is too difficult. According to Joelle, “There’s a lot of people that like I said tried to go back to school, but because it’s so hard, they give up.” Isi noted that there are challenges of returning to school after a long period of time. In regard to returning, she expressed, “I think it has to do with years too ... they come in and talk to me and some of the other colleagues ... and it’s just tough to get back.”

A barrier for undereducated adult learners that Eva perceived was in relation to the specific expectation in her course to find your own co-operative education placement. Although she felt this was a challenge for her far less, she felt it would be even more so for those students whose first language was not English. She commented, “You can imagine if, you know, if English wasn’t your first language ... how difficult it must be for people.”

Changes in Self or in Understanding of AET

One of the research questions was whether the participants reported experiencing change (or transformation) in what they thought about themselves or their views on AET as a result of participating in an AET programme.

Voice of security. Dan felt more secure in applying for jobs. He said, “The jobs I am applying for now are totally different than the jobs I applied for a month ago.... Confidence has a lot to do with it.” Dan further elaborated on how he could see things differently. He said, “My perspective’s changed because I am living it now; like what I

probably should have done is [taken] more courses as I should have spent the money myself, then maybe I wouldn't be in this position."

Bonnie, in reflecting on preparing for her future, stated, "You know, some of my goals might have changed."

Voice of engagement. Eva commented that she is much more apt to learn now as an adult than when she was in high school. She now recognizes, "I don't mind getting up in the morning and coming to school, you know, like you're more eager to learn; you know you need education."

Voice of relationship. In response to the question of whether or not she felt she had changed as a result of her participation in the programme, Bonnie claimed, "It's changed me.... I don't know if it's going to work so much [everyday] and doing this [programme], but it's changed me."

Gayle felt that she had changed her image in the eyes of others as she feels now that when people look at her, they are recognizing that she is a working person.

Similarly, Haley felt that she had become "a bit more socially inclined" and sensed that "people see [her] differently than they did at the first of the course."

Bonnie seemed to allude to a need to establish more of a work-life balance when she said, "I don't have time for friends or family lately because I do school and I do work ... so, I don't know, it's changed me."

Carl indicated that he felt transformed as he stated, "Two years ago, I would never have seen myself in this spot. I was a lot different 2 years ago, so I have changed quite a bit." He saw that he had developed a better attitude. He exemplified this by saying, "I

had a better attitude when I left the course.... Before I started wanting to do something proper in my life, I almost got in a fight with a guy the first few days.”

Voice of competency. Dan said that he could sense changes in himself. In terms of building the confidence to apply for higher level jobs, he stated, “Each week is a new unit and test; it racks up my confidence.

In concluding this presentation of phenomenographic findings, I note that of the four qualitatively distinct voices of the undereducated adult learner, I have placed the voice of security in a hierarchically superior position to the voice of engagement, voice of relationship, and voice of competency by virtue of the stronger rate of responses related to this voice as evidenced in the qualitative data collected in this study.

Researcher Reflexive Findings

In this section, I present my reflexive data as the researcher in this inquiry. I recorded these data regularly throughout the research study in an effort to capture my feelings, thoughts, and reactions to the study methods. In contrast to reflections, which are conscious thoughts of what took place during the study, reflexive thoughts are conscious experiences, according to Guba and Lincoln (2005), of “the self as both inquirer and respondent” (p. 10). Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) described reflexivity in the context of ethnographic research. They stated, “Whereas reflexive ethnography maintains that the ethnographer is not separate from the object of investigation, the ethnographer is still viewed as a unified subject of knowledge that can make hermeneutic efforts to establish identification between the observer and the observed (as in modernist interpretive traditions)” (p. 328). I use this example of ethnography as a parallel to phenomenography as both are methodologies which entail qualitative analysis. The

purpose of presenting my reflexive findings is that they are considered, along with the participant interview data and the participant weekly electronic critical incident reports data, a tripartite component of my approach to the triangulation of data. These reflexive data may also give the reader insight into how my background as a professional in the field of AET has contributed to the co-creation of findings. The following section contains both reflexive as well as reflective findings.

On Study Methods

Most of the 11 participants said that they enjoyed participating in the study. Some felt honoured that their voices would be accounted for and that they were somehow representative of other undereducated adult learners like themselves. Others commented that the interview questions gave them a chance, which they might not have had otherwise, to deliberately reflect on their experiences in their AET programme and what those experiences meant to them. Having two rounds of face-to-face interviews with virtually the same questions, I believe, was beneficial. The first round served to establish rapport, allow participants to get to know me as a researcher, and develop a sense of trust and comfort with me prior to the second round of interviews. I felt that I got to know the participants by the end of the second round of interviews on a more personal basis as they seemed to open up and share more of their personal stories and journeys. The face-to-face interviews gave me a chance to observe body language and adjust my questions or deliver prompts more effectively than had the questions been administered in a survey format.

The ongoing weekly electronic critical incident report process was disappointing in terms of the response rate. As much as I tried to use further prompts to elicit more

elaborative responses, it was not the most effective strategy. Many participants apologized saying that they were just too busy to keep up with them; a couple of others, I think, found writing in English to be taxing for them while speaking was much easier.

My own reflexive notes were written immediately after each interview with a participant in an effort to capture the context in which the interview took place and my impressions about the attitude of each participant at the time. These notes helped me to reflect on what went well and what I could improve upon for the subsequent interview phase.

On Motivations for Participation in AET

My sense from most of the participants was that they were having overall positive experiences in their AET programme. The frequency of iterations comparatively between motivations for and barriers to formal AET seemed more or less equally represented in the data. I wondered if my sense of the positive shining through was more a factor that most participants enjoyed participating in the study itself and, hence, left me with that impression. In my reflexive journal, there were many instances where I noted that the participants appeared upbeat, optimistic, and confident. There were instances too where I noted participants seemed conflicted. I reflected that this overarching positive impression may have been due in part to the participant self-selection process where I assumed that those who would volunteer to participate in a study on adult learning would be more inclined to display more favourable body language while being interviewed.

This observation that participants tended to be more positive than negative about their experiences in their AET programme may be attributed, according to Adair (1984), to the Hawthorne effect which has been identified in the social science literature as the

confounding of results from subjects modifying their behaviour in an experiment when they know they are being studied. Adair noted that although detected in some studies, the Hawthorne effect was not revealed in various other studies likely due to the lack of control of variables.

It seemed clear to me that many of the participants wanted to tell their personal stories or to have their voices heard. Some, once they had developed a level of familiarity and trust with me, started talking about their personal stories in more depth. I continued to record and listen to these stories until they appeared to veer off from the essence of the interview question at which time I endeavoured to bring them back to the essence of the research question. This tendency in some, however, struck me as being an important part of the process of understanding their voices in an expanded context of the challenges they were facing outside of school.

Another area of expressed motivation appeared to be in engaging in the learning process in an active or hands-on way. I was most interested in hearing from the one participant who had achieved an engineering degree 10 years prior, had not entered the field, and had now found herself in a trades exploration/pre-apprenticeship programme. Her enthusiasm for the programme underscored the value she placed on learning of an applied nature. Many other participants also indicated their enjoyment of the applied nature of their programme. I reflected that the AET system seems to appeal to those who prefer the applied learning style. It appeared that many of the participants in this study were impatient with theoretical components and expected the programmes to have a pragmatic outcome for them.

On Barriers/Challenges to Participation in AET

I noticed that a few participants had an overriding concern about what their peers were doing or not doing. This struck me as an interesting phenomenon as I would have expected them to be focused more on their own issues rather than on those which they perceived in others. For example, several participants indicated experiencing a difference in how they felt they themselves were progressing in comparison to some of their peers. They compared themselves in ways in which they felt they had faster and better comprehension of English instructional materials, a higher level of creativity and initiative in seeking out employment opportunities, and a more respectful attitude toward the teacher. This led me to reflect on whether this phenomenon was indicative of a way to bolster their self-esteem or whether there is a grain of truth that grouping undereducated adult learners into the same programme with significantly varied levels of literacy and/or workplace skills and/or social/cultural differences, creates this sort of comparative activity.

Another area of predominant concern by a couple of participants was in their reported lived experience of being coerced by the funding agency into taking a particular course of study for which 1 participant believed the labour market was shrinking and for which another participant felt pressured into completing all grade 11 and 12 credits in 1 year followed by a subsequent 2-year college programme because the funding policy would only allow in total a 3-year completion schedule. I reflected on my previous work experience as an adult programme developer and remembered instances of government funding agencies, through their policies, placing a premium on getting an injured worker retrained for a position at the previous salary level or favouring funding approvals with

an emphasis on the fastest way to employment resulting in minimally sustainable jobs. I do not argue with the logic of taking the most efficient route to employment, but I believe more consideration should be given to a higher level of sustainability in a job prospect.

Several participants indicated their struggle between staying at or going back to a job which paid them a sufficient level of salary and in sacrificing this opportunity in the belief that the AET programme would be an investment in their future earnings. I found myself resisting the urge to tell them they made the right choice in coming back to school to try to improve their circumstances which made it clear to me what my bias was. I found myself feeling disappointed at an employer (who was not identified in any way) where the participant shared her story that she was actively being sought by a former employer to return to her job knowing that she had made a commitment to retraining in an effort to improve her life circumstances. She could not resist the overtures being made as she began working weekends and evenings while studying full-time in the AET programme and subsequently struggling with insufficient quality time with family and friends.

On Needs Being Met in AET

One area in which several participants noted their needs were being met was in the process of working toward a formal credential. It seemed that this “carrot” was being pursued with high expectations that it would lead to a better job. I wondered to what degree the participants were preparing themselves in the event that their credential, when earned, does not translate into better employment. I believe there is a sense by undereducated adult learners, beginning on the path to further education, that they will be successful by virtue of completing an AET programme and earning a credential.

Although employers ask for credentials in job postings, it remains a significant challenge still for adults to re-enter the workforce. One participant, in particular, observed the nature of job postings, which seemed to be asking for a combination of very specific qualifications, skills, and experience, leading him to question whether he needed to continue to acquire various and multiple qualifications in order to be successful in the labour market.

Another area where needs were being met for some participants was related to the experience of helping others (a) in the classroom, as in fellow classmates; (b) at home, such as with children; or (c) in the community, as with utilizing technical skills learned, for example, those of a Personal Support Worker. This emphasis on altruistic needs underscored for me the importance for some adults to be generative with their learning. One participant believed that she had a gift of ESP and healing abilities. I then understood better and respected her goal of becoming a social worker.

On Needs Not Being Met in AET

Several participants indicated their disappointment with programme staff members who did not help them connect to an employer, either for a co-operative education placement or a job upon completion of the programme. A few indicated their teacher helped point them toward some employers, but in most cases, students found themselves responsible for finding the employer connections with little or no support. On the other hand, my (perhaps biased) experience has been that if undereducated adult learners are assisted totally in making these connections, some do not appreciate the work that goes into finding employers to participate in the training. I have witnessed in my past professional experience in the field of AET students not following up on leads that

are given, quitting the employer with no notice, or demonstrating poor attendance or attitude while placed with an employer. I believe the best situation is to structure the placement process so that there is a shared responsibility among the educational programme staff, the students themselves, and the participating employers who all understand the challenges that undereducated adult learners face and establish fair and reasonable expectations that would mitigate problems and help keep students attached to the work placement.

On Academic Growth in AET

All participants felt that they were learning in the various areas of English literacy, numeracy, computer skills, and specific technical skills commensurate with the goals of their particular programme. Several admitted that prior to beginning their programme, they did not have confidence in themselves that they would be able to learn the curriculum and were surprised and pleased to discover that not only was some of what they thought was going to be difficult, was, in fact, not difficult, but also that they were capable of learning new things. Some expressed that they had to work hard, such as the Francophone participant who said she had to work twice as hard as native English-speakers just to master the vocabulary, and another participant who said he would throw the math lessons against the wall, but would eventually complete them. My overall sense from the participants was that where participants had a struggle, they subsequently experienced a great deal of pride in their accomplishments.

On Personal Growth in AET

One feature that stood out for me about the personal growth of participants was the degree to which these participants developed or drew upon their sense of

determination. Not only did they show determination in securing funding to attend their programme with its multitude of barriers, but also their determination to master the curriculum and work toward completing their programme. Several participants talked about having to assert themselves with government funding agencies in order to get into the programme that they wanted or to expedite their application so that they did not miss a narrow window of opportunity. I wondered to what degree other undereducated adults, who were not so assertive, gave up on the process once they had begun. I also wondered if this personal attribute of assertive determination is one that is required for adults to be successful in getting funding and, if so, what the implications of that are.

On Value of Formal AET

In reflecting on the comments by the participants on the value of formal AET, I compared them with the context of informal AET which is gaining more recognition in the field of AET and being touted as a possible superior strategy for adult learners in terms of its accessibility, uniqueness to each learner, and ability to skirt the issues of social exclusion. After reflecting on participant voices, I considered that their comments, related to (a) the achievement of a credential; (b) direct learning from peers; (c) presence, support, and guidance of a teacher in the classroom; (d) rewards of helping other classmates with schoolwork; and (e) effectiveness of teacher-directed study compared with self-study, were indicative that these undereducated participants were finding their AET experiences of great value to them. Some of the participants, upon their own reflection, wondered why they had not pursued further AET earlier. Their reflections made me wonder to what extent adults do not seek further AET until they find themselves out of a job or unable to progress in the workplace and to what extent is AET,

in the minds of adults, tied to the demands of the labour market as opposed to being thought of as a means for personal development? I believe that AET has become first and foremost associated with productivity aims, but I can glean through the voices that are resonating from these participants, that there are other benefits that adults are experiencing even if their initial primary goal was to improve their marketability for jobs.

On Rationale for Low Participation in AET

The majority of responses to the question on why participants think there is a low participation rate in AET referenced issues related to (a) lack of knowledge on how to access information about careers and financial assistance; (b) how to be successful at getting funding approval for retraining; (c) maintaining concurrent responsibilities for oneself and family members; (d) a perception of insufficient resources such as finances, time, motivation for learning; and (e) tolerance for change. I noticed that several participants used the word sacrifice in describing their experiences in participating in AET. If adults anticipate participation in AET to be a sacrifice of some kind, then it is no wonder that participants are reluctant to pursue it even if they acknowledge a need for it. I wondered how we could frame adult education such that adults anticipate, see, and experience it as a reward rather than a sacrifice not only as a means to meet their pragmatic goals, but also as a means to develop personally and to feel more socially included.

On Transformative Learning in AET

The perceived changes expressed by participants ranged from a vague sense of change to explicit recognition. These reflections of perceived changes also varied as to whether they were felt as a change in how participants viewed themselves or a change in

how they thought about or interacted with others. I noticed that the changes participants reported were of a positive nature. Only 1 participant described that her programme invited students to submit their personal reflections, but that students were reluctant to continue to do this. This participant said the reason was that students did not see the value in it. In my own teaching experience with adults, I remember learners showing resistance to any activity in which they were asked to deliberately reflect on their learning and development. I wondered why this was the case and appears to still be the case, according to this participant. Perhaps, participants while asked to critically reflect are not being taught how to do it systematically and what to do with the ideas that come to them. I believe that this reflection can be helpful, but I recognize that it may be difficult or of no interest for some to do. Teachers who ask students to engage in this activity should be knowledgeable and trained to do this with skill and be prepared for what may be catalyzed in students, such as the expression of negative emotions.

Summary of Chapter Four

In this chapter, I presented the results of this phenomenographic case study. The findings were reported in three main sections including: (a) participant demographic findings, (b) phenomenographic findings, and (c) researcher reflexive findings.

In the participant demographic findings section, I presented descriptive profiles of the 11 study participants in terms of their gender, age, marital status, number of children, citizenship, first language, programme sponsor, formal level of schooling, socioeconomic status, and sociocultural background.

The major phenomenographic findings in this study indicated four qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adult learners reported their experiences of

participation in AET programmes in Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate. These qualitatively different ways of experiencing constituted four categories of description which were represented as voices of the undereducated adult learner. I reported the findings relating to these voices in the sections (a) voice of security, (b) voice of engagement, (c) voice of relationship, and (d) voice of competency. I found that the voice of security was hierarchically superior to, or stronger than, the other three voices.

I concluded the findings chapter with a description of my reflexive notes as the researcher which pertained to (a) the study methods, (b) motivations for participation in AET, (c) barriers/challenges to participation in AET, (d) academic growth in AET, (e) personal growth in AET, (f) value of formal AET, (g) rationale for low participation in AET, and (h) transformative learning in AET.

Five graphic organizers follow summarizing the major phenomenographic findings and are depicted as: (a) Figure 3-Motivations/Barriers, (b) Figure 4-Needs Being Met/Needs Not Being Met, (c) Figure 5-Academic Growth/Personal Growth, (d) Figure 6-Value of Formal AET/Why Low Participation, and (e) Figure 7-Change in Self or Understanding of AET.

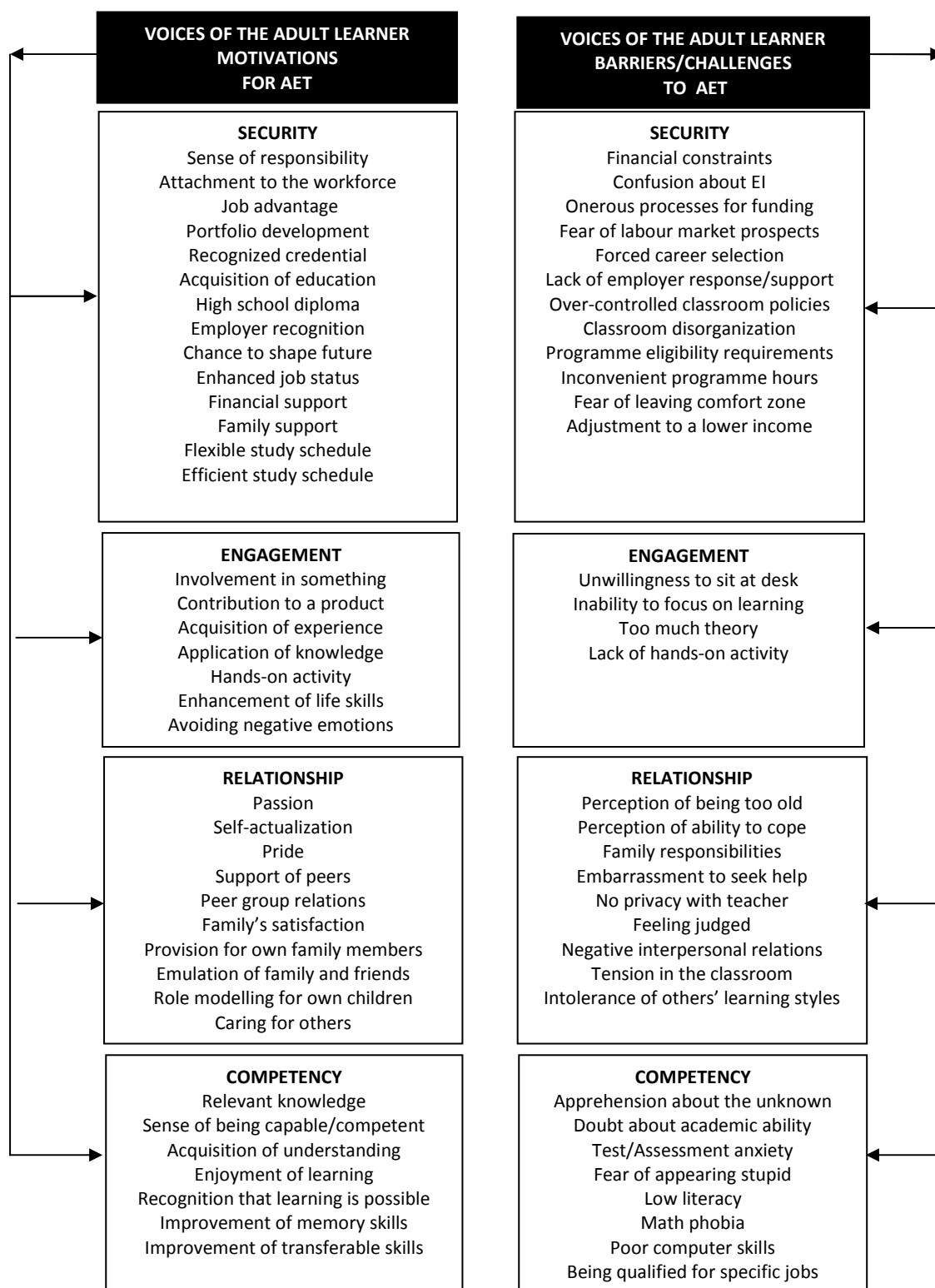


Figure 3. Phenomenographic findings for motivations for and barriers/challenges to participation in AET.

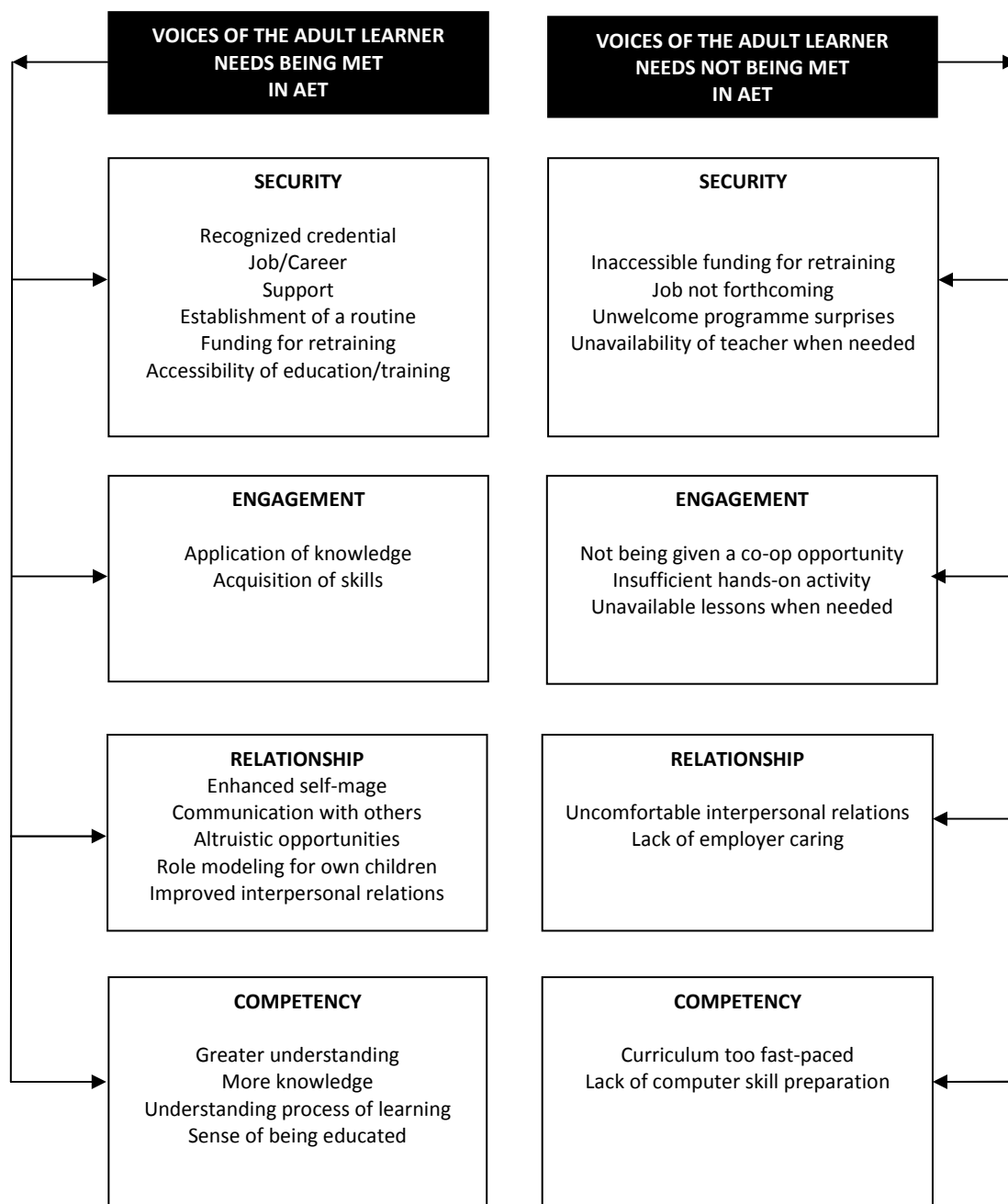


Figure 4. Phenomenographic findings for needs being met and needs not being met in AET.

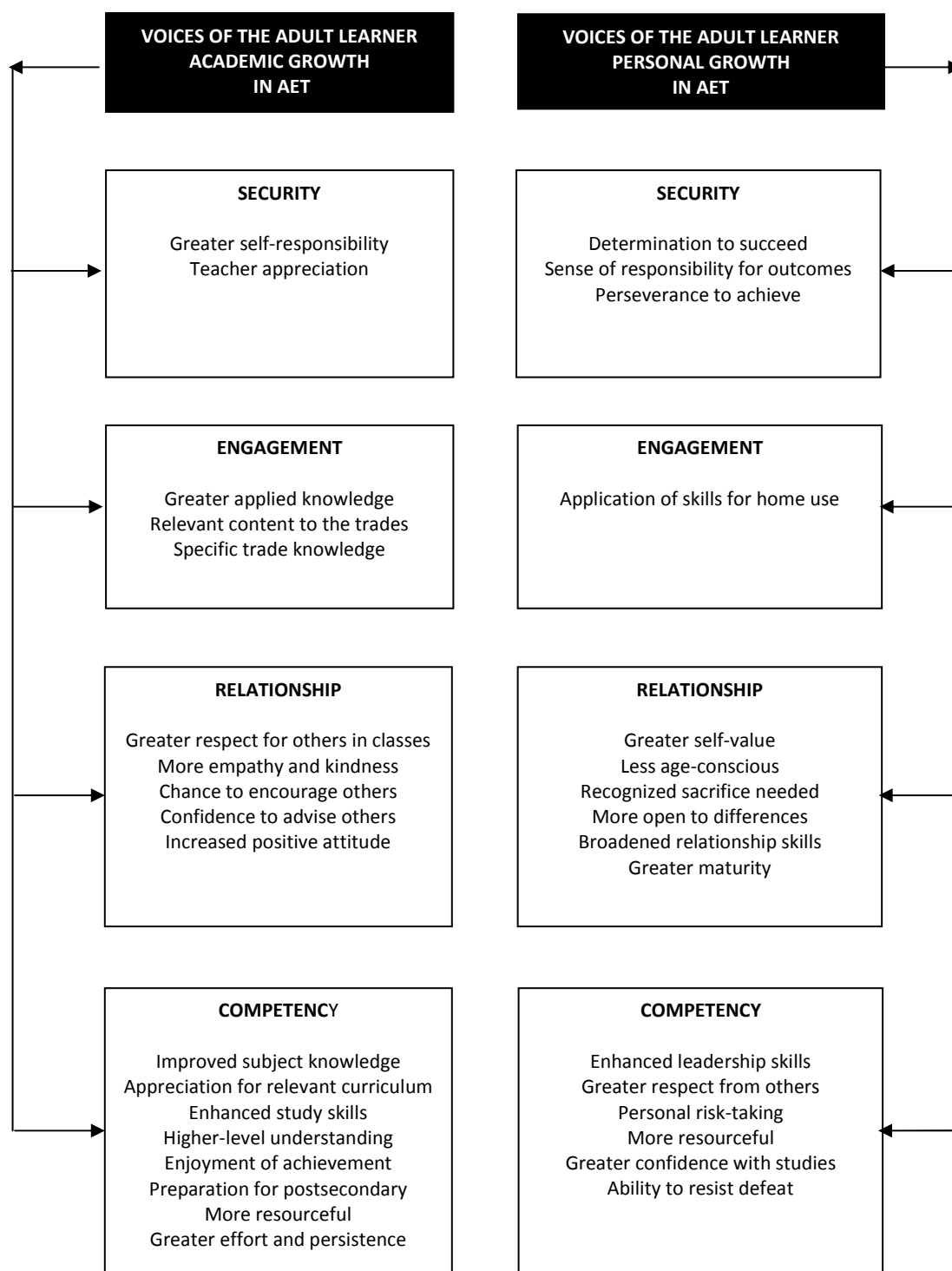


Figure 5. Phenomenographic findings for academic growth and personal growth in AET.

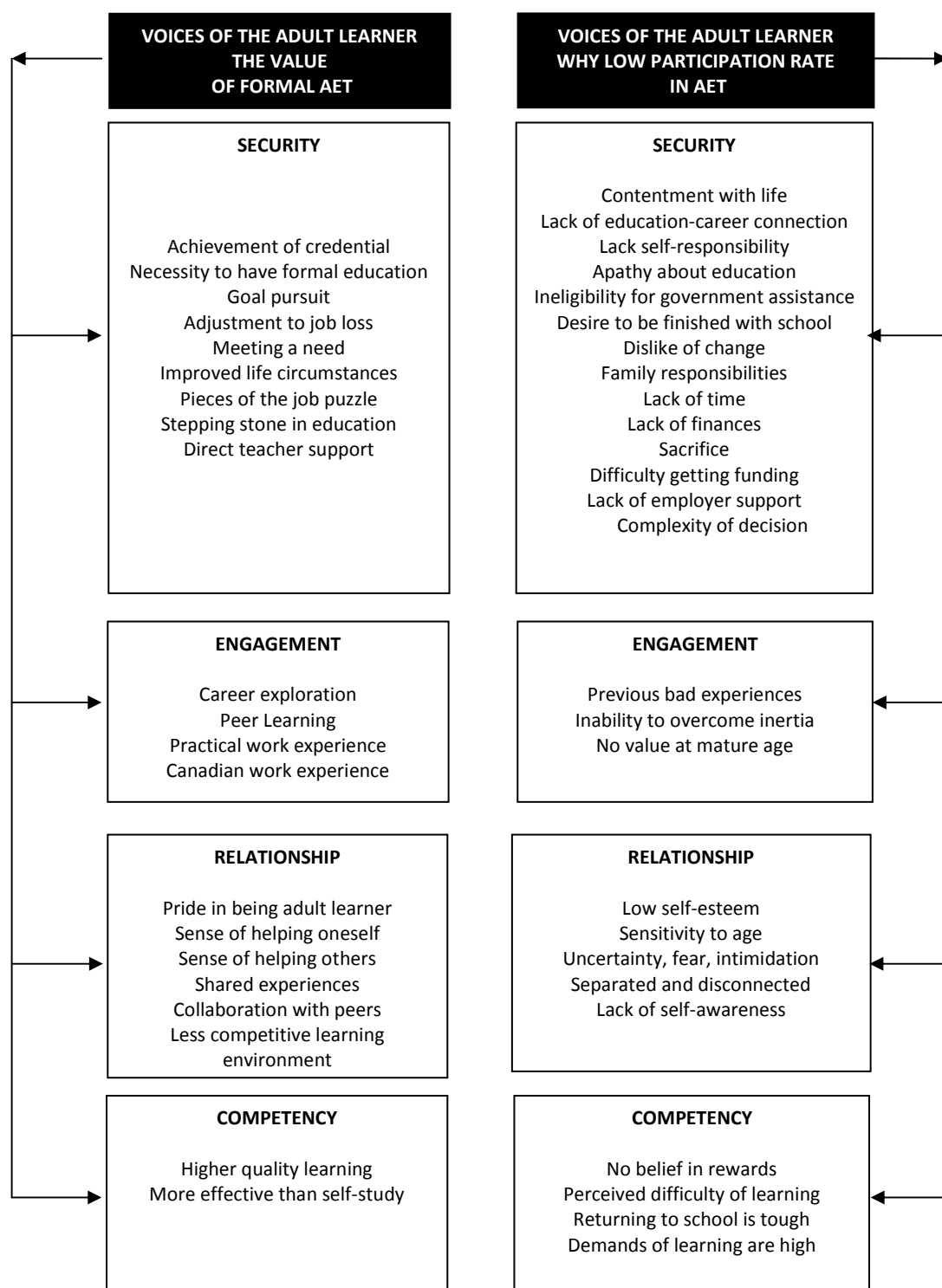


Figure 6. Phenomenographic findings for value of formal AET and rationale for a low participation rate.

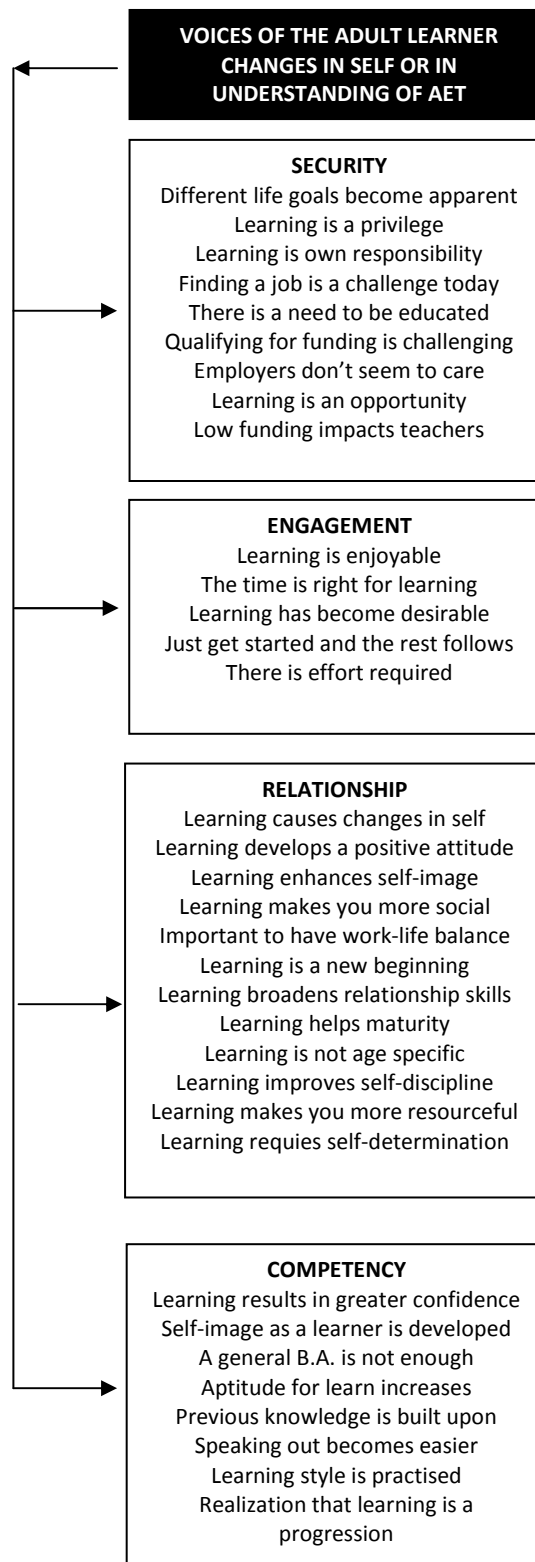


Figure 7. Phenomenographic findings for changes in self or in understanding of AET.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This research study was conducted within the context of the adult education and training system (AET) in Canada, comprised of formal and non-formal modes of learning, which exists with a view toward human capital development as a key to improving the economic well-being of individuals and of Canada. The problem underlying this research study is that there is a relatively low participation rate in the Canadian AET system by undereducated adults with a high school level or less of formal education.

The low participation rate in Canada in 2008 of 43%, according to Statistics Canada (2009c), is significant because AET programmes are considered a means to develop greater human capital which is linked to a higher level of economic outcomes for individuals and countries. Based on this problem, the rationale for this study was to examine whether or not AET programmes are meeting the needs of undereducated adults beyond a narrow focus on an instrumental approach associated with human capital development.

In keeping with the foregoing rationale, the purpose of this study was to explore the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of participation in adult education and training (AET) programmes offered by publicly funded school boards or their arms-length affiliate. The scope of this research inquiry was limited to 10 participants who were of the group of undereducated adults and 1 participant who had a higher level of education.

I reviewed literature related to (a) learning theory, (b) motivations for participation in AET, (c) general barriers to participation in AET, (d) structural barriers to

participation in AET, and transformative learning in AET which comprised the theoretical framework within which this study was based. I then presented a critical analysis of the AET literature which focused on the multitude of research in the field that has been conducted as survey research and addressed key knowledge gaps in the field of AET.

In terms of methodology, I conducted this research inquiry within a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm as a phenomenographic case study which provided descriptions of the lived experiences reported by study participants. I drew a sample of 11 study participants from a variety of AET programmes across four geographic areas of the province of Ontario. I described the data collection processes of two face-to-face interviews, critical incident reports, and researcher reflexive notes. I outlined the phenomenographic model of data analysis and reviewed the constructs of research validity and research reliability as they relate to this phenomenographic study.

For findings, I reported participant demographic findings, phenomenographic findings, and researcher reflexive findings. My phenomenographic findings indicated four qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adult learners reported their experiences of participation in AET programmes in Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate. These qualitatively different ways of experiencing constituted four categories of description termed voice of security, voice of engagement, voice of relationship, and voice of competency. I reported my reflexive comments on the topics of study methods, motivations for AET, barriers/challenges to AET, academic growth in AET, personal growth in AET, value of formal AET, rationale for low participation in

AET, and transformative learning in AET. I then presented five graphic organizers summarizing the major phenomenographic findings.

The following discusses the implications of my findings to theory and practice and to further inquiry. I then close this chapter with my conclusions and personal thoughts.

Implications of Findings to Theory and Practice

In this section, I discuss the implications of my findings to learning theory, human capital theory, theory in complementary fields, and further inquiry.

Learning Theory

Adult learning theory, according to Merriam et al. (2007), includes a variety of theories, models, and frameworks which each capture some aspect of adult learning. A foundational theory upon which early adult learning theories were built was that of Dewey's (1938) theory of experience and its relation to education for youth.

Dewey posited that education must be based upon the actual life experience of the individual and that learning is based on the concept of continuity, or in other words, learning is a continuum of growth. An example in my findings of the continuity of experience comes from Abbey as she stated, "You now understand why you're doing something and you now understand how you can improve on things you've been doing in the past." Another example was expressed by Fedir who said, "After this course, I have a better understanding of what I was doing in that [past] environment." In extending one's learning along the continuum to the future, Isi explained about her developing math competency that "each chapter depends upon that chapter being understood and done and then go to the next one."

My findings that adult learners have qualitatively different ways of reporting their experiences in AET underscore the importance of recognizing what the life experience is of learners as it is described by them in order that we as educators in our practice can help learners see how their past experience can be used to build upon present experience and how this continuity of experience extends to shape their future direction.

Lindeman (1989) drew upon Dewey's theory of experience in claiming that in adult education, the resource of highest value is the learner's experience. Lindeman purported that adults want from their learning experience "intelligence, power, self-expression, freedom, creativity, appreciation, enjoyment, and fellowship" (p. 9). Many of these values were supported in my findings. For example, the value of intelligence was expressed in the voice of competency by Gayle when she said, "I like the learning part about it; the things I didn't know that turned on a light in my head." The value of enjoyment was exemplified in the voice of engagement when Carl expressed, "Honestly, now I love coming in for framing; I love it. I wouldn't really care if I wasn't getting paid right now." The desire for fellowship was also supported in my findings illustrated in the voice of relationship as Abbey said, "We're all here to work together and if you don't get something, talk to me or talk to this person. You want to study together; it's just a totally different atmosphere compared to university in that respect."

These varied values by the participants make it clear that it is important in AET to recognize the need for various kinds of experiences within the learning environment in order to, in our practice, develop curriculum that is tailored to nurture these individual values.

The art and science of helping adults learn is the definition given by Knowles (1980) of the model of andragogy. In this model, the most important learning is learning how to learn, that is, the skills of self-directed inquiry. From this, Knowles assumed that adults have a need to move from dependency to self-directedness. An example from my findings related to this concept is offered by Bonnie who stated, “I’ve decided to continue my education after this. It’s perfect because now I have pretty much set myself out to learn—how to learn.”

Knowles made another assumption in the andragogical model that people attach greater meaning to learning they gain by experience than that they acquire passively; therefore, the primary techniques in education should be experiential. The voice of engagement addresses experiential learning as Gayle said, “I found [the teacher] had a more hands-on approach and I think a lot of us who are mature people need to have that hands-on.”

Knowles also asserted that people become ready to learn when they have a need to learn in order to cope with life problems; therefore, learning programmes should be organized around life applications. This assertion is supported in my findings of the voice of security in which Joelle stated, “The kids don’t get it; they don’t think they need an education, but adults know they need it to get jobs.”

A further assumption that Knowles made in the andragogical model is that learners see education as helping them to achieve competence; to achieve their potential; therefore, learning should be organized around competency development. To illustrate this concept from my findings, in the voice of competency Bonnie indicated, “When I came into the math, I didn’t know how to render a tape properly. Coming out of the

programme, I have progressed a lot.... I never used to read, but now I read a lot.” From the above examples, it is evident that participants voiced experiences that support Knowles’ assumptions in the model of andragogy.

Accordingly, in our practice as adult educators, we should endeavour to help adult learners (a) understand how to learn so that they become comfortable with continuing their education, (b) apply their knowledge and skills in an effort to connect experientially with their learning, (c) to recognize how their learning can help satisfy a need they have in life, and (d) progress through their learning by building upon previous successes.

Jarvis (2004) contended that the individual learner in adult education and lifelong learning is situated in the learner’s social context and, as such, is affected by socioeconomic phenomena. For example, the phenomenon of globalization, described by Merriam et al. (2007) as the process of increasing integration of economies on a worldwide scale particularly through trade and financial flows, has had the effect, according to Jarvis, of placing great emphasis in adult education on its instrumental value (potential to improve productivity) at the expense of it providing for the broader good of the population.

A significant volume of participant responses in my study revolved around the importance of participating in their AET programme for the purpose of preparing for the labour market with a view toward securing their future. An example in my findings of the recognition of the connection between education and the marketplace comes from the voice of security in which Dan stated, “For peace of mind, the new job market dictates that you’ve got to have that high school diploma so you have to at least have that.” Haley was thinking about an incremental approach to preparing for the labour market as she

said, “If you can in a year after taking this [Personal Support Worker] course go to school for another year and become a Registered Practical Nurse, wow, look at the jump in pay.”

The high volume of responses related to adult learners’ goal of participating in AET in order to find a job lends support to Jarvis’ concern that adult education has become a commodity to be sold on the learning market. The implication is that the AET system may be focusing too narrowly on preparing adults for the workplace at the expense of broader developmental goals of education. In our practice as adult educators, we should help learners understand their life circumstances in the broader socioeconomic context so that they can situate their experiences and decisions in this broader context.

The focus of AET on an instrumental approach is thought to be the result of the influence of human capital theory. The implications of my findings in relation to human capital theory are presented in the following section.

Human Capital Theory

The phenomenon of globalization has evolved under a neo-liberal ideology defined by Harvey (2005) as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). This neo-liberal ideology is more commonly known as capitalism and, according to Bowles and Gintis (1975), it forces individuals to sell their labour power to exist.

An implication of being forced to sell one’s labour power relates to the notion of individuals being strongly guided to prepare for certain labour markets. This notion is illustrated in my findings in the voice of security by Kyle who felt coerced by the funding

agency processes to train for a career as a teacher when it was a career that did not hold value or hope for him as he stated, “It’s hard to be motivated when I know I’m probably going to go through 4 years and end up at Mike’s Mart somewhere because I won’t be able to find a job.”

Human capital theory is about improving one’s labour power. It proposed that a higher level of formal education will lead to improved individual, societal, and economic outcomes (Becker, 1964; Mincer, 1958; Schultz, 1961; Smith, 1776). The most important investments in human capital, according to Becker (1993), are education and training. Such investments, according to Schultz (1961), account for most of the impressive rise in the real earnings of workers.

Myers and de Broucker (2006) expressed concern that the least-educated individuals are at risk of being left behind in a knowledge based economy because they are least likely to pursue AET. As such, they are likely to face low wages and a higher rate of unemployment over their working lives. In my findings, this point is illustrated in the voice of security from Joelle who said, “If they didn’t have this [the programme], they wouldn’t have any chance for improvement and the only other option is welfare which most people won’t go on unless they are totally desperate.”

The emphasis on a human capital approach to AET is evidenced in the OECD (2006) report which indicated that among most of the developed countries it surveyed, more than 70% of all formal education and training programmes taken by adults were for the purpose of job-related skill development. The high rate of response from participants in my study expressing motivations for participation in their AET programme related to

getting a job suggests that human capital theory played a significant role in their decision to participate.

Although the rise in real earnings is important to the standard of living of individuals, Robeyns (2006) criticized the human capital model of education as being entirely instrumental valuing education, skills, and knowledge only in so far as they make a direct or indirect contribution to economic productivity. A major effect of an emphasis on human capital development, according to Usher et al. (1997), is that education has become increasingly commodified and focused on a market relationship in which knowledge is exchanged for the instrumental value it has for the consumer. This has led to a concern by McMurtry (1998) that adult education is not providing a space for the civil commons—the space where individuals participate in social activities for the benefit of society. This space, according to McMurtry, encompasses language, literacy, cultural heritage, and organizations associated with the public sphere.

One of the areas of social concern expressed by some of the participants was their self-concept of being too old to undertake education and training as though they felt education was only for the young. My findings in the voice of relationship illustrated this point as Abbey said, “[I was] hoping they wouldn’t rule me out because of my age [41] and saying you know what; you’re too old for this programme.... Will I be able to withstand whatever they were throwing at me?” This example points out the need for adults to gather together, as part of their AET programme and in addition to their skills training, to critically examine myths of this nature. In practice, this would require adult educators who could recognize what limiting self-concepts learners hold in the learning context and be skilled at helping adult learners develop critical thinking skills.

A narrow focus on a human capital approach has also contributed to an era of credentialism, according to Becker (1993). Spence (1973) characterized the credential as a market signal to the employer that the applicant has the underlying abilities to do the job, but according to Becker (1993), the pursuit of a credential does little to improve productivity. The implication of my findings in regard to credentialism is that there exists different ways that participants understand this concept which lead these participants to different conclusions. For example, if it is thought that the credential itself will solve the future (economic) security issue, we see learners, such as Bonnie say, “It’s going to bring to you pretty much a career or something at the end of it” and Dan say, “I needed to know that I would get a diploma. I need the security of it.... I needed to know that I would have something waiting for me in the future” and Fedir say, “When you actually pull the diploma and show them the basic proof ... it means a lot; they’re worth hiring.”

In these examples, the curriculum should be built such that the learner comes to understand that one’s propensity to be productive in the workplace does not rest on the credential per se, but on one’s abilities to perform well in the context of a particular work setting. A different understanding of credentialism was expressed by Eva who said, “Half the time they don’t even care what it is just so that they can see that you’ve accomplished something.” It is important for the adult educator to recognize that these varying conceptualizations exist in order to help train adults to think critically about what the credential can actually do for them.

Theory in Complementary Fields

Mackeracher et al. (2006) recognized that there is value in integrating other fields with adult education in order to develop knowledge that would be helpful to adult learners. They stated, “Adult educators need to collaborate with writers and researchers in fields other than adult education to develop knowledge of value to adult learners” (p. 27). In keeping with integrating fields that could complement the field of adult education, I briefly review as follows theoretical models proposed by theorists outside of adult education and relate how my findings could be viewed in light of them. These include: (a) transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000); (b) theory of human motivation (Maslow, 1987); (c) trait complex theory (Ackerman and Heggestad, 1997); and (d) temperament theory (Keirsey, 1998).

Mezirow (2000) defined transformative learning as the change that occurs due to critical reflection in one’s taken-for-granted meaning perspectives that may generate new beliefs or opinions that will prove to be more justified to guide action. Although Mezirow (2000) focused on the psycho-critical aspect of transformative learning in which individuals self-examine their assumptions about an experience and revise specific assumptions that provide for new meaning, Daloz (1986) focused on the psycho-developmental approach to transformation where individuals examine ideas about themselves and formulate new, more developed perspectives.

The data from this study suggest that from the psycho-critical perspective, the undereducated learners experienced changes in how they viewed things within the context of learning in adult education. Certain participants (a) overcame an initial fear that they could be successful, as Bonnie declared, “I’ve decided to continue my education

after this;” (b) had a newfound optimism about moving toward a better future, as Carl said about getting the GED, “Looking to the future, it will help me in the end;” (c) began to see different life goals, as Bonnie stated, “You know, some of my goals might have changed;” (d) understood learning could be co-operative rather than competitive, as Abbey described, “The class size is a lot smaller; it’s more intimate. For whatever reason, there isn’t the same competitiveness ... like in university;” (e) were grateful that they were going to be able to do something to help others, as Isi said, “I am not only helping my own aboriginal people, but I am helping others too;” and (f) discovered they had an inner drive to acquire a higher quality of knowledge, as Abbey realized, “It’s about the comprehension regardless if you get 95%.”

From a psycho-developmental perspective, these adult learners changed how they viewed their own personal development and how they relate to others. Certain participants (a) realized the joy of learning from and with peers, as Gayle stated, “A lot of experiences have been brought to the table.... I could learn from the older people in the class;” (b) began to sense a real responsibility for oneself, as Abbey reflected, “[I am] taking full initiative and responsibility in whatever comes out of what I’m doing;” (c) felt proud to be a learner, as Dan beamed, “It was kind of a pride thing; I had never finished [high school];” (d) recognized in themselves a more positive attitude, as Carl said, “I had a better attitude when I left the course;” (e) developed a better self-image including an acceptance of their more mature age in a formal learning context, as Haley realized that “age is just a number and they see you more as just another student taking the course as opposed to ... that old woman;” (f) experienced more confidence, as Dan said, “The jobs I am applying for now are totally different than the jobs I applied for a month ago....

Confidence has a lot to do with it;” (g) enjoyed a greater self-respect, as Bonnie proudly stated about her leadership ability, “People, they respected me;” (h) had developed a fierce determination to succeed, as Isi reflected, “There were a few times in January to the end of June I wanted to quit ... No ... I am not going to be defeated;” (i) started to become more socially inclined, as Fedir felt that his relationship skills had broadened as a result of interaction with classmates of varying ages; and (j) became more open to differences in other people, as Carl credited the programme for helping him to become “more open to different people and stuff; like, if you look in our class, there are a lot of different people with different lives.”

Implications of my findings to transformative learning theory are that undereducated adults can and do experience changes in how they view themselves as learners and in how they understand the processes associated with the Canadian AET system. Although adults may not come to new realizations about AET without participating, once they experience participation, they can change their meaning perspectives, thus contributing to a greater retention rate in AET and a greater chance of participating in higher education. In practice, adult educators should help learners to reflect on their beliefs and values about themselves as learners and about how the AET system can best help them in order to broaden their understandings.

Maslow (1987) posited a theory of human motivation that identified five levels of human needs which are hierarchically dependent upon a previous level being satisfied. I review these five levels briefly and relate my findings to them. According to Maslow, the most basic level of need is physiological which includes among other needs, a need for the human organism for “activity, stimulation, and excitement” (p. 16). My findings

suggest that this need was expressed by participants in the voice of engagement as Carl voiced excitement about what he was doing in his programme, “[I] felt very motivated to come to class because of the material that was being taught that week.”

The second level up in Maslow’s (1987) hierarchy was safety needs which include among others needs, a need for security, stability, and order. The voice of security in my findings could relate to this human need as a significant number of participants expressed motivations and/or concerns about successfully being prepared for their future. Examples of preparing for one’s future security included: (a) taking responsibility for oneself as Abbey declared, “I’m the only one that’s going to keep going;” (b) having structure and order in their classrooms as Gayle expressed frustration that in not getting marks back in a timely manner, she felt doubtful about her readiness to begin her work training placement; and (c) having the highest level of learning support as Eva complained that employers were not supportive enough in making co-operative education placements easily accessible.

The third level of human needs in Maslow’s (1987) hierarchy was belongingness and love which refers to a “hunger for relations with people in general—for a place in the group or family” (p. 20). The voice of relationship in my findings pertains to this level and is illustrated by Isi who said, “The thing is you are drawn to each other’s experiences or they may be similar.”

The fourth level in the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1987) was esteem needs which pertains to “self-respect or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others” (p. 21). My finding of the voice of relationship included this need of a positive intrapersonal relationship. For example, Kyle expressed a feeling of pride about himself and in how

others felt about adult learners when he said, “At our grad, like they get the MPs and everything; everybody really appreciates mature students finishing.”

The fifth and highest level in Maslow’s (1987) model of motivation was that of self-actualization. This level is related to the individual “doing what *he* or *she*, individually, is fitted for” (p. 22). Although my findings illustrate that some participants expressed this need, I did not find this as a separate category of description, but instead interpreted it to be part of one’s sense of intrapersonal relationship. An example comes from the voice of relationship as Gayle, speaking about her previous visits to a relative in a long-term care facility, shared, “I got more hands-on of what consisted of a nursing home and who is the frontline and that helped me make up my mind and what I could really do as a PSW.”

One of the differences between my findings and Maslow’s (1987) hierarchy of needs is that my category of the voice of competency does not align with any specific level in the hierarchy. Maslow refers to the desires to know and understand as “techniques for the achievement of basic safety in the world, or for the intelligent person, expressions of self-actualization” (p. 23). Another difference is that although Maslow’s hierarchy of needs identified the physiological level as being most fundamental to human motivation, my findings suggest that the voice of security, more closely aligned with Maslow’s second level—safety needs—was the most salient in undereducated learners’ motivation to participate in AET. This emphasis by the study participants on preparing for their future security lends support to my rationale in carrying out this study to examine whether or not the AET programmes are too narrowly focused on preparing adults for the labour market. In practice, we as adult educators need to recognize in adult

learners that their main motivation for participation is to have a successful labour market outcome and should be supported in that regard as much as possible, but that there are other needs expressed by adult learners which play a role in the quality of the learning experience and the overall development of adult learners.

The theory of trait complexes, espoused by Ackerman and Heggestad (1997), identified four distinct complexes. They purported that these trait complexes determine academic and vocational orientations of individuals. These four trait complexes are: (a) social, (b) clerical/conventional, (c) science/math, and (d) intellectual/cultural. The following discusses how my findings have some relevance to them. The first trait complex is termed social and was purported by Ackerman and Heggestad to include individuals oriented towards enterprising or social interests. There is a similarity in this enterprising orientation to my finding of the voice of engagement where certain participants expressed a desire to be enterprising in their learning environment. For example, Bonnie stated, “It would be really sad for me if I just decided, you know, this is it; I’m done ... because I will never be able to be a part of the finished product.”

A second trait complex, espoused by Ackerman and Heggestad (1997), was termed clerical/conventional which is seen in individuals who have conventional interests and who express traits of control, conscientiousness, and traditionalism. This could be correlated with the voice of security in my findings where there was value attached to doing what is thought to be right or traditional in the context of enhancing one’s security for the future. An example of this was Joelle who believed that people who need to improve their life circumstances should take formal AET in order to avoid going on welfare.

The third trait complex of science/math, in which individuals have an interest in investigative activities, according to Ackerman and Heggestad (1997), could share a similarity with the voice of competency in my findings where learners identified a desire to investigate new knowledge. This was illustrated by Abbey who said, “I’m learning and it’s answered my questions on what I had before I entered the programme that my other past instructors couldn’t teach me.”

Finally, the fourth trait complex deemed intellectual/cultural by Ackerman and Heggestad (1997), in which there is a trait of openness, could be related to the voice of relationship in my findings as certain participants expressed an interest in being open to and helping others. This was expressed by Gayle who said, “My needs are to be educated enough to help the elderly. I need assurance that I am using all of my abilities to keep them safe.”

Temperament theory espoused by Keirsey (1998) posited four personality constructs that contribute to a person’s dominant character. These temperaments consisted of: (a) artisan, (b) guardian, (c) idealist, and (d) rational. As an artisan, an individual is interested in learning about techniques and in using equipment. The voice of engagement in my findings could relate to this temperament as certain participants expressed a desire to learn skills of a practical nature. An example of this was Abbey who valued her growing skills in the plumbing trade as she said, “I am working on my kitchen faucet this weekend to try and fix it. Today, we installed toilets and laundry tubs the correct way.”

A second personality temperament, termed guardian by Keirsey (1998), pertained to individuals interested in protecting themselves against insecurities in life. This

construct could share a similarity with the voice of security in my findings in that certain participants voiced a desire to provide for better means for their future. For example, Dan stated, about the hope of his current training being a stepping stone to a better job, “I was working at an entry level and I didn’t know how to move up, and the only way to move up is get education.”

The third temperament, espoused by Keirsey (1998), was termed idealist which pertained to individuals with an interest in the humanities, morale, and personnel. The voice of relationship in my findings could share a similarity in that certain participants expressed a desire to help others (e.g., their children or members of a community), as an outcome of their learning. This was illustrated by Isi who said, “So I made the right decision ... [Parents] will sacrifice something they are doing for their child. We all do as mothers; that is the instinct we have.”

Finally, the rational temperament valuing knowledge and achievement, according to Keirsey (1998), could be associated with the voice of competency in my findings where certain participants expressed a desire to really learn something of relevance to them. An illustration of this was Carl who valued his programme in that it “gave you basic knowledge about the three trades.”

Unlike trait complex and temperament theory which presumes individuals have a dominant character, I did not present my findings with the implication that any given adult learner had a dominant voice. Outcomes of a phenomenographic analysis are such that data from all participants are combined from which interpretations are made on the collective data in an effort to identify qualitatively different ways of experiencing a phenomenon. However, from the foregoing theories of (a) human motivation (Maslow,

1987), (b) trait complexes (Ackerman and Heggestad, 1997), and (c) temperaments (Keirsey, 1998), there is some support for the findings in my study which identify that there were at least four qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of participation in AET. The implication for practice is that adult educators design varied learning tasks so as to build on the unique strengths of the adult learners which are reflected in the varied voices.

Implications of Findings to Research in AET

In this section, I provide a closer look at how my findings support existing research in the field of AET on (a) the problem of a low participation rate, (b) the motivations for participation, (c) the general barriers/challenges to participation, and (d) the structural barriers to participation.

Problem of Low Participation

According to Statistics Canada (2009b), out of the overall participation rate in the Canadian AET system of 43% of Canadians aged 25-64 in 2008, the participation rate for those with less than a high school level of education was 14%, for those with a high school level education was 25%, and for those with a postsecondary level education was 44%. This represents, for those with a high school diploma or less, a significant underrepresentation in formal and non-formal AET programmes compared with higher-educated adults.

The findings in my study support the conclusion of Myers and de Broucker (2006) that this underrepresentation is due to a variety of factors. Moreover, Gayle in this study concluded that, “There are so many things that are weighing on people’s decisions; it’s not black and white.” Examples of participant perspectives on why more

adults are not participating in formal AET are: (a) Bonnie seeing education as a risk and stating, “It’s a sacrifice that if you don’t have the support behind you, then you know it literally is sacrificing like you/your life;” (b) Fedir commenting on the difficulty in getting funding and relating, “One of my relatives was trying to open a business.... And it’s like it’s a big, big, big test you have to go through. Then even if they [funding agencies] qualify you, they still torture you in different kinds of questions;” (c) Isi feeling that it was about inertia and explaining, “Once you get into it and once you start getting over the stumbling blocks and then it starts to pick up and then you become more decided;” (d) Dan being concerned about his age and admitting, “If you are talking to [people] between the ages of 30 and 45, they are likely to re-educate. The older guys are like, I’m 53, so who’s going to hire me;” and (e) Isi relating to the difficulty of returning to school after many years away and noting, “I think it has to do with years too ... they come in and talk to me and some of the other colleagues ... and it’s just tough to get back.”

Given the examples of voices of undereducated adults noted above, these learners indicated that adults have to contend with a multitude of factors in considering participation in AET. An implication of my findings is that it is not a simple matter of addressing certain motivations or removing certain practical barriers when it is likely that any given individual can possess any number and any combination of these motivations or barriers which can combine to make the choice to pursue higher education a highly complex endeavour.

Adding to this complexity of the combination of multiple motivations and barriers are messages that adults receive about education. According to Hansen (2008), a low

participation rate in the AET system by undereducated adults may be associated with the following major premises of Western formal education which, Hansen asserts, are flawed: (a) assimilation into society via academic achievement is best for all citizens, (b) school knowledge is superior to other forms of knowledge or experience, and (c) academic achievement and self-esteem/human development are synonymous.

Motivations for Participation

Houle (1961) conducted an inquiry on a small sample of adults enrolled in a variety of continuing education programmes in Chicago. Results of this inquiry indicated a typology of adult learner motivation which classified adult learners as: (a) goal-oriented, (b) activity-oriented, and (c) learning-oriented. In keeping with Houle's results, my findings indicated that within the voice of security, many of the participants had a clear goal in mind in participating in their AET programme, for example, Isi stated, "I am going to go somewhere ... I am going to accomplish at the end of it all ... that goal is to find that diploma." Some were motivated to participate as a result of being engaged in hands-on activity. Within the voice of engagement, Abbey recounted, about learning applied skills in a pre-apprenticeship programme, "I learned a ton ... I totally learned a whole new sector of knowledge.... this is all, again, practical; it's all applied." Others were motivated by the experience of learning itself. Out of the voice of competency, Haley said about her course of study, "It's caught my interest now. I was interested in getting the certificate, with different aspects of it; now I'm learning."

Boshier (1971) later developed the original version of the Education Participation Scale (EPS) to measure adult learner motivations in a New Zealand context. Boshier (1991) then investigated the construct validity of the EPS and found that it was

psychometrically sound after being tested in North America and Asia. The results indicated seven factors of adult learner motivation including: (a) communication improvement, (b) social contact, (c) educational preparation, (d) professional advancement, (e) family togetherness, (f) social stimulation, and (g) cognitive interest.

In keeping with Boshier's (1971) seven factors of motivation, there were data in my findings that aligned with these seven factors. Related to communications improvement, Carl said about taking his programme, "[It's] made me more open to different people and stuff." In terms of social contact, Carl recalled, "In high school it didn't really work out ... I didn't really get along with the teachers, but here ... the teachers sit down and work with you." Educational preparation is illustrated by Joelle who having just lost her job said she would need to finish grade 12 as a minimum prerequisite. An illustration of professional advancement comes from Fedir who stated, "I want to move up further in my life, grow, and get better jobs in terms of what I do." In terms of family togetherness, Gayle indicated, "My kids are very supportive. They're picking up extra duties at home. My husband now is watching the kids on Fridays." Social stimulation may be represented by Gayle who said about her training with the elderly, "[It's] intriguing and exhilarating for me that I can make a difference in these peoples' lives." Finally, related to cognitive interest, Abbey declared, "I am picky about what I am learning. I am not the type to store or learn useless information."

In terms of Houle's (1961) and Boshier's (1971) research on motivations for participation in AET, my research provides an analysis of a wider range of factors relating to participation in AET beyond that of motivations. For example, I reported findings on barriers/challenges to participation, needs being met, needs not being met,

academic growth, personal growth, value of formal AET, rationale for low participation, and changes in self or in understanding of AET. My findings also were presented as qualitatively different ways in which adult learners reported their experiences of participation in AET across a collective of participant experiences rather than presenting a typology of the adult learner as in Houle's (1961) findings. The implication of my findings through a phenomenographic approach is that if we can better understand the lived experiences of undereducated adult learners from as many perspectives as possible and from their own expressions, we may be better able to identify perspectives that could be addressed that would enhance the participation rate in AET.

General Barriers/Challenges to Participation

Existing research on barriers to AET include, but are not limited to, findings from Cross (1981) who classified barrier types as situational, institutional, and dispositional. Fagan (1991) offered a classification of barriers which included life factors, programme factors, and learner-inherent factors. Hart et al. (2002) found that two major deterrents were work and family responsibilities and lack of interest.

These barrier types and classifications of barriers/deterrents noted above are reflected in my findings of the four voices of undereducated adult learners. In terms of Cross' (1981) classification of situational barrier, which appears similar in nature to Fagan's (1991) classification of life factors, may relate to my finding of the voice of security as it includes, for example, the issues of the lack of finances to take an AET programme and little support for adjustment after job loss. For example, Bonnie said, "I am very happy to be in this programme even though they don't pay me [but] I have to work part time." Furthermore, Dan was challenged by the fact that his employer whose

company closed down did not provide a satisfactory level of support in understanding how to navigate the rules to qualify for government funding for a retraining programme. Related to Cross' classification of institutional barriers which seems to align with Fagan's programme factors, there may be relevance to my finding of the voice of security. An example is that Eva reported being exasperated by the request that she contribute to the cost of her textbooks in her funded programme as she recalled, "I wouldn't get accepted to school because I was asking them to pay for all my books." An illustration of Cross' dispositional barriers that may share similarities with Fagan's learner-inherent factors, comes from Kyle who was embarrassed to ask for help from the teacher as he stated, "There is no privacy ... especially mature students because it's embarrassing to them that maybe they're not as smart as some of these other kids."

A unique difference between my findings on barriers/challenges to participation in AET and those of various existing studies is that my findings were generated through a phenomenographic data analysis compared to positivistic analyses. As such, my data add a qualitative element to the AET research literature by reporting participant expressions of their lived experiences of participation in AET.

In an interpretive study using a grounded theory analysis, Hall and Donaldson (1997) established the Life Influence Model of Participation and identified barriers related to pre-adulthood factors, patterns of nonsupport in adulthood, conventional deterrents, and lack of voice in adulthood. Even though our respective results were arrived at by a different qualitative research approach, my findings mirror some of their findings. For example, related to their pre-adult factors including past educational experiences, in my study, Bonnie referred to how she experienced her past education and

how she had come to understand things differently stating, “I left high school at a very young age.... Before, people would have one career and stick with it even if it was boring and paid well, but now adults have the opportunity to go back and try whatever they want.” Related to patterns of nonsupport in adulthood from an interpersonal perspective, this was present in my findings in the voice of relationship as Carl struggled with the experience in the classroom of negative interpersonal relations. He recalled, “Stubborn people that thought they knew everything and people that let people down.” In terms of conventional deterrents in the Hall and Donaldson study, with child care being cited as the number one reason for nonparticipation, my study found within the voice of relationship that Eva valued the scheduling and homework policy of her AET programme because “if you have kids ... you’re not spending all your time at school and he doesn’t give you a lot of homework. He thinks your family should come first.” The category of lack of voice, referring to the way a woman feels about herself, was reflected in my findings in the voice of relationship where Abbey recognized that she had improved throughout the programme in how she felt about herself stating, “My perspective of myself has become stronger.... I know I have value and I’ve seen my value from being here.”

The Hall and Donaldson (1997) study was similar to my study in that it targeted a small sample of underserved women, although my sample also included men. Both these studies also shared a similarity in that they were conducted within an interpretive paradigm. This meant that data were collected via participant interviews and qualitative analysis was employed. The differences were that in the Hall and Donaldson study, data analysis was conducted in accordance with the guidelines for a grounded theory analysis

whereas, in my study, I followed the guidelines for a phenomenographic analysis. A further difference is that the Hall and Donaldson study resulted in the development of a model of participation where the relationships among the factors were explored, whereas my study resulted in the identification of qualitatively different ways in which participants reported their experiences of participation in AET.

Structural Barriers to Participation

A critical perspective in understanding participation in AET suggests that barriers exist of a macro-level, structural nature which cause learners to express resistance or to fail in their learning (Brookfield, 2005; Crowther, 2000; Freire, 2000; Jarvis, 1985; McLaren, 1989; Rubenson, 1998).

Jarvis (1985) claimed that a middle-class bias can be found in the content of adult education programmes. For example, programmes such as adult basic education in literacy and numeracy are designed by the middle class as a second chance for those who were not successful in the initial education system, but are oftentimes not enough to improve the social mobility of these adult learners. According to Jarvis, “The existence of second chance education actually produces an appearance of greater equality of opportunity and, hence, reinforces the existing social structures since it provides additional support for the rights of those in powerful positions” (p. 143). Jarvis noted that those outside the middle class come to accept that those in powerful positions in society have rightly merited their positions. This unchallenged acceptance of the social structure then can act as a macro-level barrier to participation of adults in AET programmes.

In my findings, the notion of acceptance of the dominant culture is reflected in the voice of security as Carl seemed to believe and accept that once he finished his trades exploration programme, he would not be eligible for funding to continue his training. He stated, “After this course, I could get an apprenticeship programme and go to school here, but it costs like \$9,000 and I would have to get a loan from the government.” Brookfield (2005) acknowledged this and other forms of structural barriers which has led him to define adult learning in part as comprising the tasks of ideology critique, contesting hegemony of the ruling-class, and learning liberation— finding individual voice among stronger voices who define the agenda.

Structural barriers, for example, the unquestioned acceptance of the social structure, can result in the expression of various forms of resistance by adult learners—a theory espoused by McLaren (1989). This resistance on the part of learners is seen, according to McLaren, as examples of (a) failing to take advantage of the school’s potential to give them an edge in society; (b) trying to fit in with middle-class values at the expense of their own cultural values; (c) displaying abrasive behaviours; (d) opposing the rules of the school; (e) exhibiting violence, racism, and sexism; (f) rejecting mental labour as effeminate; and (g) expressing fear and skepticism.

In addition to positing the theory of resistance, McLaren (1989) questioned the notion that school failure is caused only by individual learner deficiencies, but that active refusal can in fact be class, culture, or race specific forms of resistance. My findings suggest that the participants experienced structural barriers which could contribute to a potential lack of success which would not be related to any individual learner deficits. Examples were learners who said they were surprised, disappointed, and angry in (a)

experiencing the process of acquiring funding as difficult and intimidating, (b) feeling coerced into a particular career selection, (c) being continually passed over by employers even once they had retrained, (d) finding that programme schedules made it difficult to attend school and take care of their families, and (e) being given entry academic assessments for which preparation was not given to alleviate their fears.

In support of the examples above, Joelle found the acquisition of funding to be difficult. Within the voice of security, she said, “If you don’t push, the government is not going to give you what you want ... you keep on going and calling them and asking them.” Eva found that accessing funding was intimidating, as she remembered a funding counsellor saying to her, “I don’t have to recommend you, you know.” Feeling pushed by the funding agency into pursuing a career path as a teacher, Kyle said, “It’s hard to be motivated when I know I’m probably going to go through 4 years and end up at a Mike’s Mart somewhere because I won’t be able to find a job.” Passed over by employers for consideration when his training was nearing completion, Dan was disheartened as he reflected, “You just kind of get a little discouraged because I put in for so many jobs and I’m not hearing a lot back and the worst part is, I have got a good resume.” Gayle, finding that the programme schedule was going to be a challenge for her, said, “The long-term hours at extended care is from 6 to 2. And that is going to be a barrier for me. My girls have got to get up to get to school.” Taking entry assessments—as a function of qualifying for funding—put a lot of stress on applicants due to a lack of preparation about what to expect. Isi illustrated the point about not being sufficiently prepared for screening assessments as she said, “I can’t use a calculator and I can’t use a cheat sheet....

I wouldn't mind having seen that mature student test.... So now I got to prepare myself for that.”

Implications of my findings to the research are that they support the concept that structural barriers are being experienced by certain adult learners and that resistance to the dominant culture is being expressed by adult learners in various ways. This implies that an explanation for a low participation rate in the Canadian AET system could be found in the work of McLaren (1989) in that a low rate of participation may be a form of resistance not entirely due to personal deficits of learners, but partly due to structural barriers that exist.

Implications of Findings to Further Inquiry

Although qualitative research is not intended to generalize to the population, its value is in its ability to enlighten and to catalyze new ideas for further study. As a result of the findings in this study, in which participants reported their experiences of participation in AET in the voice of security, voice of engagement, voice of relationship, and voice of competency, I suggest the following areas for potential further inquiry.

That the voice of security was expressed by some participants could prompt further inquiry into (a) the difficulties faced in accessing funding for AET—this exemplified by Dan who said about the information session to begin the funding application process, “There must have been about 300 people there.... It takes you 8 weeks just to get in to that;” (b) how funding is implicated in the choice of career paths—this illustrated by Kyle who said of the process of choosing a career direction, “You’re given a book and you get all these different fields ... and they give you a couple weeks to pick 20 and say okay, and you don’t know nothing about any of them ... it’s hard to do;”

(c) how employers are sharing in the responsibility for training—seen in the comment by Eva who said about trying to set up her own co-operative education placement, “I am calling companies and trying to get their information.... That was hard because a lot of people don’t want to talk to you;” (d) how programme schedules invite or discourage participation—this described by Gayle who complained about the extended hours for training at the long-term care facility saying, “That is going to be a barrier for me. My girls have got to get up to get to school;” (e) how marketing of programmes could alleviate fears by addressing common concerns—this exemplified by Gayle who said, “Can I do this? Are they all going to be younger than me? What are the hours going to be like? Will I be able to study again?” and (f) the effect family and friends have on learner participation—this illustrated by Carl as he recounted, “I was going to get kicked out of my house unless I went back to school or something.”

As a result of my finding of the voice of engagement, further research could be to investigate (a) how the curriculum could be made more engaging with applied learning strategies—this represented by Gayle who was relieved that “this week was very different from the rest; we are doing more hands-on work;” (b) how learning could be made more enjoyable—this illustrated by Abbey who expressed, “One of the systems I have always liked ... is co-op style learning.... All that time you’re applying the practical with what you’re learning in the book ... there’s huge value in this;” (c) how learning could be made more relevant to skills required professionally and personally—this exemplified by Carl who said, “I want to be able to wire up my own electrical stuff one day and [would] just like some general knowledge.” .

Within the context of my finding of the voice of relationship, further inquiry could be made into (a) the self-image of age and its relationship to participation—this evidenced by Dan who said, “At my age, you are starting to think about slowing down now and you’re making plans for that second part of your career;” (b) how a positive self-concept as a learner can be shaped—this illustrated by Abbey who said, “My perspective of myself has become stronger.... I know I have value and I’ve seen my value from being here;” (c) how a positive attitude toward others can be cultivated—this represented by Fedir who felt his maturity had increased and that his relationship skills had broadened;” and (e) the social benefits of belonging to a learning group—as seen in the comment by Dan who said, “I think older people are intimidated especially because they didn’t go to college in the first place.... They even feel more separated.”

The expression of the voice of competency in my findings may relate to further research into (a) the relationship between the belief that one can be successful and participation—this illustrated by Joelle who said of other adults not participating, “There’s a lot of people that like I said tried to go back to school, but because it’s so hard, they give up;” and (b) how to build on a learner’s existing knowledge and experience to make learning more meaningful—this exemplified by Joelle in indicating how much she was learning said, “I know I need to improve a lot more, but my comprehension in it is way, way bigger than it used to be.”

In terms of my findings that adult learners can experience changes in themselves or in their understanding of the AET system, further research could investigate (a) the relationship between readiness and participation—represented by Carl who said about the time leading up to his decision to participate in AET, “I was kind of angry and I was

really bored;” (b) how finding a good job is more than just getting a credential—illustrated by Abbey who declared, “I don’t need the piece of paper. I want to prove to you that I’m better than any paper you can give me;” and (c) the effect of self-determination on success—seen in the comment by Carl who said, “So while I am here, I am just going to come in here and hammer down on it and get my GED.”

In general, by inviting undereducated adults in this study to describe their lived experiences of participation in AET, and by actively listening to their voices, I have generated some insights for these further areas of potential inquiry. If this inquiry were to be extended using the lenses of age, race, ethnicity, class, gender, and orientation, it is likely that further insights would be gleaned about the phenomenon of participation in AET.

Conclusions

In this study, I generated insights into the lived experiences of undereducated adult learners who were engaged in formal and non-formal AET programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate. My rationale for conducting this study was to examine whether or not AET programmes are meeting the needs of undereducated adults beyond a narrow focus on an instrumental approach associated with human capital development. My purpose, then, was to explore the qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences participation in AET programmes.

My findings revealed four qualitatively different ways in which undereducated adults reported their experiences of participation in AET programmes which included: (a) voice of security, (b) voice of engagement, (c) voice of relationship, and (d) voice of

competency. That the voice of security, related to issues around access to and successful completion of an AET programme for the purpose of securing one's future, was more highly represented in the findings, lends support to my conclusion that the AET programmes appear to be narrowly focused on an instrumental approach and, as such, may not be meeting all the needs of undereducated adults as evidenced in the other voices, such as the voice of engagement, voice of relationship, and voice of competency.

I now synthesize the findings of this study with the overarching issues of the focus of the AET system on primarily human capital development—it being a function of globalization. I re-iterate, however, that although my qualitative findings can generate insight into the experiences of undereducated adult learners, they cannot be generalized to the population based on the limited purposive sample. Therefore, I offer the following models only for the purpose of synthesizing my conclusions as they relate to undereducated adult learners and not for the purpose of applying these models to the general population of adult learners.

Instrumentalist Model of AET

From my review of the phenomenon of globalization and its relationship to a human capital development focus in AET and my findings in this study which revealed strong motivations by participants to take an AET programme to enhance their security for the future, I recognize that an instrumentalist model of AET appears to be central to the design, implementation, and expected outcomes of the Canadian AET system.

Accordingly, I have depicted a model in Figure 8 that represents my understanding of this instrumentalist focus in AET. In my representation, the phenomenon of globalization, set in the context of a neo-liberal ideology, is front and

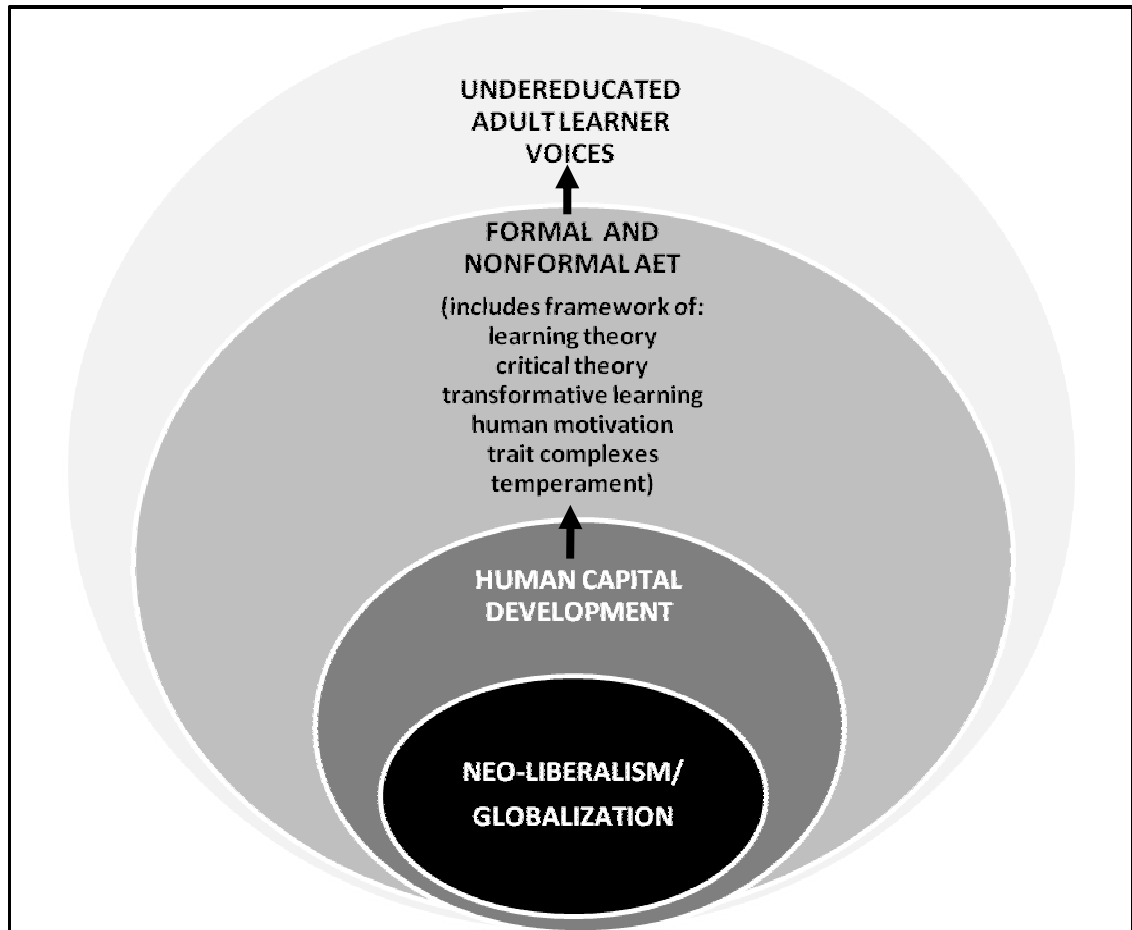


Figure 8. Author's depiction of an *instrumentalist model* of adult education and training (AET) in which undereducated adult learner voices are overshadowed in the background by the prominent structural processes related to globalization. Human capital development occupies a dominant position in relation to the broader theoretical framework discussed in this study. In this model, it is suggested that the needs of undereducated adult learners are not entirely being met in the formal and non-formal Canadian AET system due to the dominance of human capital development theory.

centre as the driving force for the aim of human capital development. Undergirding the central positioning of human capital development in the AET system is the theoretical framework I discussed in this study which included: (a) learning theory (Dewey, 1938; Jarvis, 1985, 2004; Knowles, 1980; Lindeman, 1989); critical theory (Brookfield, 2005; Freire, 1973; McLaren, 1989); transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000), theory of human motivation (Maslow, 1987); trait complex theory (Ackerman and Heggestad, 1997); and temperament theory (Keirsey, 1998).

In the instrumentalist model of AET, subdued in the background by the overarching aim of human capital development, are the voices of the undereducated adult learners expressed by them as their lived experiences of participation in the AET system. In this model, I would question (a) whether the voices of undereducated adult learners are being taken into consideration within the narrow focus on human capital development, and (b) whether undereducated adults have any say in who participates, when participation is necessary, what learning activities will meet their needs, where programmes can be accessed, how AET can be funded, and why they are guided in certain career directions.

Inverse Instrumentalist Model of AET

As a result of the findings of this phenomenographic case study in which I found there were four qualitatively different ways in which adult learners reported their experiences of participation in an AET programme, I see a need for the instrumentalist model of AET to be inverted, as is depicted in Figure 9, in order to provide more emphasis on what adult learners are telling us about their participation. Instead of

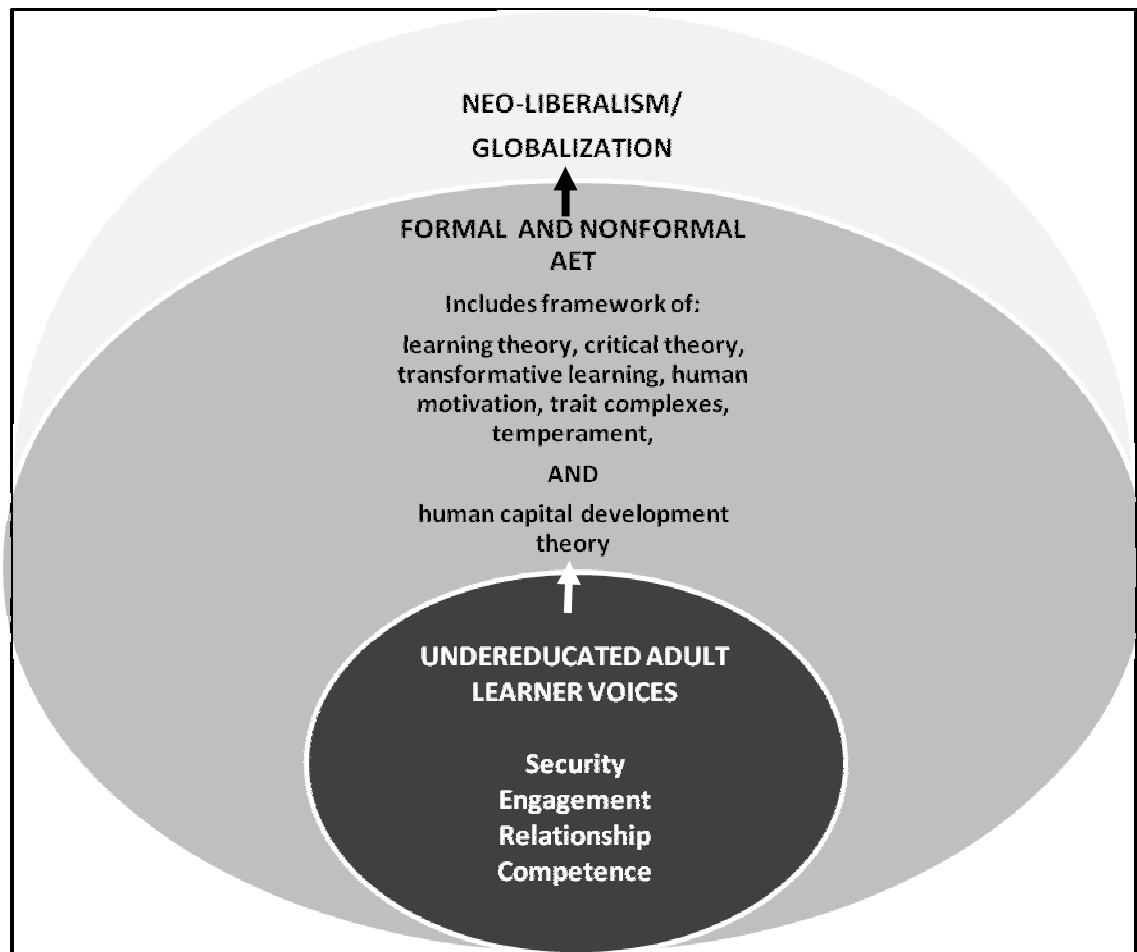


Figure 9. Author's depiction of an *inverse instrumentalist model* of adult education and training (AET) in which undereducated adult learner voices are prominent in the foreground while structural processes related to globalization are diffused in the background. Human capital development shares a more equitable position along with the broader theoretical framework discussed in this study. In this model, it is suggested that the needs of undereducated adult learners are *given voice* about their broader needs in the formal and non-formal Canadian AET system.

globalization being the driving force for the purposes, aims, assumptions, and approaches of AET which results in the undereducated adult learner voices being subdued in the background, through inversion, the focal point should be the undereducated adult learner voices. In this inverse instrumentalist model, the undereducated adult learner voices become front and centre. Through a process of giving voice to the undereducated adult learners, the Canadian AET system may be better able to develop and implement effective AET programmes that will not only satisfy the aim of human capital development, being driven by globalization, but also meet the broader needs of the learners. This could be brought about if we listen carefully to the broader needs of undereducated adults and try to address those needs within the existing AET system.

Giving Voice to Undereducated Adult Learners

Structural and perceptual barriers to professional and personal development must seem to undereducated adult learners like difficult, if not impossible, mountains to scale. I envision that through actively listening to and responding sensitively, appropriately, and effectively to the undereducated adult learner voices of which, according to this study, four qualitatively different voices can be discerned, innovations for learning in AET can be found. When efforts currently are not yielding the outcomes of improving the participation rate of the undereducated in AET to help meet the goals for a highly productive society, then it is reasonable to assume that the mountains are, indeed, too difficult to scale or do not hold sufficient meaning for learners to surmount.

In conclusion, as a society that aims to develop its human capital with the belief that doing so will provide a better standard of living for all, it is incumbent upon this society to better recognize the lived sense of needs and values, in this case, of

undereducated adult learners. What is needed is to envision better mechanisms to meet these needs and to acknowledge that the dominant approach to formal and non-formal AET, based as it is on a middle-class value system driven by the aims of globalization, may not be as effective as is necessary to engage undereducated adults to pursue further professional and personal development.

Final Thoughts of the Researcher

As the researcher completing this study, I reflect now on my professional experience as an adult educator and programme developer of AET programmes in an Ontario school board. I recall that I have seen that undereducated adult learners participate with the pragmatic goal of finding a job. Support for this observation comes from the OECD (2006) which reported that among most of the countries it surveyed, more than 70% of all formal education and training programmes taken by adults were for the purpose of job-related skill development.

In the past, I have observed adult learners throughout their programmes working hard to reach their goals and in the process, bringing their unique life stories with them. This is supported by Mezirow (2000) in that people filter sense impressions through their frames of reference in order to make meaning out of their experiences. Accordingly, as a professional in the field of AET, I recognize the need to be knowledgeable not only about various curricula that relate to growing labour-market demands in order to prepare learners for the workplace, but also about the learners' unique ways of understanding their experiences. If I can artfully listen, I might hear some grains of truth sprouting forth that will improve my understanding and practice. McLaren (1989) supports this in that

“we must take the *experiences* and *voices* of students themselves as a starting point” (p. 235).

In my past professional experience, I noted that various struggles were at play between applicants for funding and the funding approvers, between the teaching/administrative staffs and the adult learners, among the learners themselves who are from different racial, ethnic, age, gender, class, and orientation contexts within a given classroom, and between employers and newly trained adults. My findings in this study support the existence of these power relations in education as is illustrated by (a) Eva who was told by a funder that she did not have to be recommended for funding in light of her resistance to pay for the textbooks in the programme; (b) Fedir who found the teacher’s strict policy, on leaving the classroom when he felt he needed a break, too controlling; (c) Gayle who expressed anxiety about being judged should anyone in the classroom discover she had received government funding to participate; and (d) Dan who found employers were not interested enough in his newly acquired skills training. As a professional in the field of AET, it is important that I understand these power relations myself and help undereducated adult learners understand how they are situated within them.

The above examples of power relations is supported by Freire (1973) in his work with Brazilian adult learners who argued that low levels of adult literacy are the direct result of oppressive social structures and unequal power relations that are exercised in society. The existence of power relations is also supported by Brookfield (2005) who located adult learning in a critical framework which emphasizes that the purpose of adult education should be to have adults recognize how their everyday thoughts and actions are

functions of the dominant ideology which are embedded in our institutions. Adult learning, according to Brookfield, is seen as comprising among other tasks (a) challenging ideology, (b) unmasking power, and (c) contesting hegemony of the middle class.

Past experience in the field of AET has also supplied me with examples of what might be considered resistance to the learning environment by adult learners where I have seen learners (a) not follow through with their participation in a programme once they had started, (b) push the attendance policy to its limit, (c) falter in their responsibilities with an employer in regard to their co-operative education placement, (d) complain that the learning environment was actively working against them, and (e) complain that the teacher was incompetent. These examples could be seen to fit in with McLaren's (1989) theory of resistance in that students actively show resistance in an effort to contest the hegemony of the dominant culture.

My past experience also helped me recognize that a greater number of employers need to be more actively involved in AET from the point view of offering opportunities for adult learners to participate in co-operative education placements. Students believe that co-operative education is a key to them getting work experience and, hence, getting a job. In my experience, I have found that some government funded AET programmes allow for co-operative education and some do not. Findings in my study illustrate this point in that Bonnie felt there was a need to "find companies with motivated sponsors to get out there and help with all of this stuff." As a professional in the field of AET, I would support that employers play a greater role in this, but that adult students should not be allowed to take the co-operative education opportunity for granted.

I recognized that the undereducated adult learners in this study all shared a common trait of determination to overcome barriers to access, to learn new skills and knowledge, and to aim for a job that would meet their needs. A concern I have, however, is that many other adults may not have this level of determination, assertiveness, or relative confidence. How can we help the nonparticipating adults in society overcome their deep and real feelings of fear and helplessness far less in the context of an AET system that has inherent structural barriers? Another concern I have is the relative level of available funding for groups, that are typically not eligible for funding for certain types of labour-market training, such as the chronically unemployed, the underemployed--those in marginally sustainable jobs, or the stay-at-home parent who now wants to access training to re-enter the workforce after raising children?

I would hope that through a renewed understanding in the Canadian AET system of the importance of educating the whole person, as opposed to a narrow focus on specific job-skill attainment and a better recognition of how structural aspects are acting as barriers to participation, undereducated adults would become more attracted to and supported in their needs by participating in the AET system, would acquire a stronger educational foundation as a result, and would come to a clearer sense of how they are situated and can achieve their goals within society. Undereducated adult learners are not only faced with the task of understanding how to successfully access the AET system, along with strengthening their learning foundations in preparation for a new job or career, but are also now faced with the globalizing nature of the workplace in which new, global competencies will be required in addition to traditional job skills.

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Appendix A

Certificate of Completion - Tri-Council Policy Statement

Certificate of Completion

This is to certify that

Carolyn A. Maingot

*has completed the Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics'
Introductory Tutorial for the
Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS)*

Issued On: July 12, 2007

Appendix B

Research Ethics Board Clearance Letter



**Brock
University**

Office of Research Services
Research Ethics Office
St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1
T: 905-688-5550, Ext. 3035/4876 F: 905-688-0748

www.brocku.ca

DATE: June 8, 2009

FROM: Dan Malleck, Acting Chair
Research Ethics Board (REB)

TO: Dr. Michael Kompf, Education
Carolyn Maingot

FILE: 08-281 KOMPf/MAINGOT
Ph. D.

TITLE: How Learners Experience Participation in Formal Adult Education and Training: A Phenomenographic Case Study of the Least-participatory in Ontario

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: ACCEPTED AS CLARIFIED

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of **June 8, 2009 to June 19, 2009** subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. *The study may now proceed.*

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms> to complete the appropriate form Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form *Continuing Review/Final Report* is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

DM/an

Appendix C

Application to Research Site to Conduct a Study

APPLICANT INFORMATION

Name of Researcher: Carolyn Maingot
 Address: 51 Brimley Crescent, St. Catharines ON L2M 7A8
 Telephone Number: 905.646.4959 E-mail: carolynannem@live.ca
 Name of Faculty Supervisor: Dr. M. Kompf, Professor, Brock University, St. Catharines ON
 Faculty Advisor Tel. No.: 905.688.5550 x 3935 E-mail: Michael.Kompf@brocku.ca

THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

See attached Summary of Research Proposal

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

If the application is accepted, the following conditions will be met:

1. The researcher will conform to the timeframe of the study mutually agreed upon. The finishing date may be extended upon permission by the site official responsible for the research site.
2. The researcher will agree to the conditions of the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* with respect to protecting the anonymity of students, research site, school board or its arms-length training affiliate in all published reports, contacts with the news media, personal conversations, or other forms of communication (attached as Research Site Agreement).
3. Prior to the disclosure/publication of any information regarding this project, the researcher shall contact the site official responsible for the research site.
4. The researcher shall avoid the use of techniques which invade the privacy and/or threaten the integrity of the student/family.
5. A condensed report of the research study shall be sent to the official responsible for the research site, approximately two months following the completion of the study.

I hereby agree to all the terms and conditions as outlined in this application form.

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

PERMISSION GRANTED TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I hereby grant permission to Carolyn Maingot to conduct the aforementioned research project under the terms and conditions stated.

Name of Official: _____ Title of Official: _____

Name of Organization _____

Signature of Official: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D

Research Site Agreement

In accordance with the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and specifically Form 1, as set out in Ontario Regulation 517, as amended.

This agreement is made between:

Carolyn Maingot (Researcher)

and

_____ (Research Site)

The researcher has requested access to interview adult learners (aged 18+ years) in an adult education and training programme under the auspices of your organization.

The researcher understands and promises to abide by the following terms and conditions:

1. The researcher will not give to anyone access to personal information of participants in a form in which the individual to whom it relates can be identified.
2. The researcher will keep the personal information of each participant in a physically secure location to which access is available only to the researcher.
3. The researcher will destroy all individual identifiers in the personal information by September 30, 2009.
4. The researcher will ensure participant confidentiality in that a participant's name will not appear on any dissertation or report as a result of this research and that a participant will have a chance to review transcripts so that they feel comfortable they are not divulging who they are. Due to the nature of qualitative research, for example face-to-face interviews, participant anonymity to the Principal Student Researcher cannot be protected. Measures will be put in place to protect the anonymity of participants who volunteer for the study.
5. The researcher will notify [Your Organization] in writing, immediately upon becoming aware that any of the conditions set out in this agreement have been breached.

Signed at _____, this _____ day of _____ 2009.

Signature of Researcher: _____	Signature of Official: _____
Name of Researcher: _____	Name of Official: _____
Address: _____	Address: _____
Telephone Number: _____	Telephone Number: _____

Appendix E

Summary of Research Proposal

Title of the Study

Learner Experience in Formal Adult Education: An Ontario Case Study

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand the experience of learning in formal adult education for adult learners enrolled in selected programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

Rationale for Study

Adults must continue to upgrade knowledge and skills in order to fully participate in a globalizing workplace. The Canadian adult education and training system provides formal learning opportunities, but is experiencing a lagging participation rate compared with other countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development particularly among its undereducated group consisting of a high proportion of individuals with less than a high school diploma or postsecondary credential. This lagging participation rate may be an indicator that the AET system in Canada is not meeting the needs of or providing value for the undereducated. There is a gap of qualitative research that aims to understand the lived experiences of adult learners. Accordingly, this qualitative study will be carried out as a phenomenographic case study situated in a constructivist paradigm which will explore the lived experiences of learning in formal adult education for the undereducated enrolled in programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length training affiliate.

Objectives of Study

To better understand the barriers to and motivators for learning in formal adult education for [undereducated adult learners enrolled in selected programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

To better understand the learning needs that are met or not met in formal adult education for undereducated adult learners enrolled in selected programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

To better understand the academic and personal growth in formal adult education for undereducated adult learners enrolled in selected programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

To better understand the knowledge gained about the value of learning in formal adult education for undereducated adult learners enrolled in selected programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate?

Operational Procedures

- 1) Number of adult learners (18+ years) to be sampled is 8-10.
- 2) Number of research sites to be sampled is up to seven. Research sites will be Ontario school boards or their arms-length training affiliate in broad geographic areas of Ontario.
- 3) A computer terminal with Internet access at the research site will be required to administer the Personal Empowerment through Type (P.E.T.) Inventory for Adult Education. If no computer terminal is available, the researcher can provide a laptop as long as there is wireless access to the Internet.
- 4) No information from school records will be required.
- 5) Time required for the study will be approximately 5 weeks from mid-June through mid-July, 2009
- 6) Time required for participation in the study on behalf of the participant will be:
 - a) An initial face-to-face visit for completion of consent form (.25); collection of demographic data (.25), initial interview (1.5), description of weekly journal

expectations (.25); and facilitation of the on-line P.E.T. learning styles inventory (1.0) = 3.25 – 3.5 hours in total;

- b) Journal writing on-line once per week for 5 weeks for approx .5 hr each plus responses to specific prompts by Researcher = 2.5 – 5.0 hours in total;
- c) A final face-to-face visit @ 1.5 hours for face-to-face final interview;
- d) Periodic review of personal transcripts from initial interview and final interview = 2.0 hours.

Total time expected for participation is 9-12 hours..

- 7) Expected start date and completion date of the study are June 15 to July 17, 2009.
- 8) A signed Informed Consent will be obtained from each participant upon the first face-to-face visit by the researcher.
- 9) Participants will receive on-going feedback from the researcher on their electronic journal submissions and a copy of the transcript after each face-to-face interview.
- 10) Dissemination of research findings will be in the form of a dissertation to be publicly defended by the researcher. A final report which includes a summarized description of the purpose of the research and a summary of the results of the study will be prepared. Dissemination of this final report will be sent automatically via e-mail to the study participants approximately two months following the completion of the study.

Appendix F

Recruitment of Participants: Steps and Verbal Script

This procedural document and verbal script along with a copy of the Selection Criteria, Letter of Invitation, and Informed Consent will be forwarded by the researcher to the site official via e-mail who will then ask classroom teachers to ask potential participants who meet the criteria and who would have a likelihood of participating willingly and conscientiously in the study to put their name forward directly to the researcher.

Script for Site Official to Classroom Teachers:

As the site administrator or board representative, I have granted permission to Carolyn Maingot, a PhD student in the Faculty of Education of Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, to conduct a research study at our site on how learners experience participation in a formal adult education and training programme.

May I ask for your co-operation in identifying one of your students who meets the criteria on the attached Selection Criteria form and who, in your opinion, will be able to adequately communicate their thoughts in English in interviews and via e-mail. Please approach only those students whom you feel in your professional opinion would have a genuine interest in participating in the study beyond the marginal incentive of the \$50 honourarium that will be offered. Please direct interested individuals to contact the researcher, Carolyn Maingot, via her e-mail directly carolynannem@live.ca as this will maintain confidentiality of who applies and who is accepted to participate in the study.

Script for Classroom Teachers to Potential Participant(s):

Teacher privately approaches a student he/she thinks would be a good candidate to participate in this study based on the criteria listed on the Selection Criteria form and who would be considered able and willing to participate.

Our training organization has given permission to Carolyn Maingot, a PhD student in the Faculty of Education of Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, to conduct a research study on the experiences adult learners have in participating in an adult education and training programme.

Carolyn is most interested in and in need of finding study participants who lack a high school diploma or a postsecondary diploma or degree because this is the group of adults in Canada who statistically have the lowest participation rate in the adult education and training system. She also needs to find participants who meet any of the criteria listed on the Selection Criteria form which you can look at. She would like to discover, through your experiences, how the formal adult education and training system may or may not meeting your needs or providing value to you.

Carolyn will want to—over a period of 5 weeks, conduct two face-to-face interviews with you, have you complete an on-line learning styles self-assessment which she will help you with, and have you write a brief weekly journal and forward it to her via e-mail.

Please read this Letter of Invitation prepared by Carolyn that outlines in more detail what you would be expected to do in this study, how long the expected participation is, and what the benefits and risks are to participating. There is a marginal financial reward given to you for your participation and you will be able to find out information on how you learn best through a self-assessment of your learning style. Your decision to participate or not to participate will in no way affect the relationship you have with your teacher(s) or affect your educational programme.

Once you read through the Letter of Invitation, and the sample Informed Consent Form that you would eventually be asked to sign, and you wish to volunteer for this study, you will contact Carolyn Maingot, Principal Student Researcher, directly at **carolynannem@live.ca** to let her know of your interest. Your choice to participate or not will have no effect on your participation in your current education/training programme and in order to maintain your complete anonymity, you do not need to disclose to anyone that you have chosen to participate.

Carolyn will then contact you to give you information about the next step. If you have any questions about this study before you make a decision to participate, please e-mail Carolyn directly.

Please confirm with Carolyn your interest in participating in this study by Thursday, June 11, 2009. Thank you.

Appendix G

Selection Criteria

The researcher is looking for interested adult learners to be study participants who meet the following criteria. The potential participant MUST be:

- _____ In an adult education and training programme on a full-time basis at least during the months of April through June, 2009
- _____ At least 18 years of age
- _____ Lacking a high school diploma or if he/she has a H.S. diploma, at least lacking any postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree
- _____ Knowledgeable and capable of sending and receiving e-mail messages on a weekly basis
- _____ Capable enough with written and spoken English language skills to communicate his/her thoughts to the researcher throughout the study
- _____ Able to meet the researcher in a private location at the research site for interviews on three separate occasions

In addition to the participant meeting all the criteria listed above, the ideal participant will additionally meet at least ONE of the following criteria:

- _____ A single mother or father on social assistance
- _____ A mother who is returning to school after raising children
- _____ A youth (age 18-24) who has had a weak attachment to the workforce
- _____ A Canadian Aboriginal or member of First Nations
- _____ A recent newcomer to Canada with landed immigrant or refugee status who has learned English as a foreign language
- _____ A Francophone who has learned English as a second language
- _____ A member of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-gendered) community
- _____ A person with a disability
- _____ A member of a visible minority group
- _____ A displaced manufacturing worker who is at least 40 years of age

Appendix H

Selection Status for Study Participation

(FORM A)

I am pleased to inform you that you have been selected to participate in the research study entitled, "Learner Experience in Formal Adult Education: An Ontario Case Study

Congratulations on your selection as a participant. You will benefit from this participation by gaining insight into yourself as a learner, experiencing the satisfaction that you are furthering the knowledge of educators, administrators, policy makers, and other adult learners; and receiving a small financial honorarium.

I will be contacting you by phone in the next two days to set up an initial interview place, date, and time that will be convenient for you.

At this visit, I will review with you what is expected in the study; will ask you to sign the Informed Consent; will have you complete a short questionnaire about your age, gender, social background, and educational background; will talk with you for approximately 1.0 to 1.5 hour while an electronic recording device records our conversation, will talk with you about how to do the weekly journal reflections on-line; and finally, will help you get access to and complete the learning styles self-assessment tool on a computer.

I look forward to meeting and working with you as a partner in this study.

-Carolyn Maingot

(FORM B)

This is to inform you that your name has been placed on a waiting list as a potential participant in the research study entitled, "Learner Experience in Formal Adult Education: An Ontario Case Study."

If you are selected to participate in this study, you will be notified by me within the next two weeks.

Thank you for the interest you have expressed in participating in this study.

-Carolyn Maingot

Appendix I

Participant Demographic Profile

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect some basic information about you to form a participant profile. Your name will be kept strictly confidential with the Principal Student Researcher and will not be associated with this information in any report. You have the right not to answer any question below.

Please fill in the requested information and circle the options that apply to you:

Name	
Gender	
Age	
Marital Status	Single Married/Commonlaw Divorced/Separated
Number of Children and Ages	
Citizenship Status	Canadian Citizen Permanent Resident Refugee Visa Student from Other Country Country of Origin No. Years in Canada
First Language	English Other, Specify
Education/Training Programme Paid For By	Self Employment Ontario Ontario Works WSIB Native Band/Aboriginal Funding Other, Specify
Highest Level of Formal Schooling	Less than high school diploma High school diploma Some College Courses College Certificate/Diploma/Degree Some Apprenticeship Hours Completed Apprenticeship Some University Courses University Undergraduate Degree University Graduate Degree Other, Specify
Socioeconomic Status	Currently Part-time Employed Currently Unemployed Less Than One Year Out of Job

	More Than One Year Out of Job Receiving Government Income Support Receiving Private Insurance Income Support Other, Specify
Socio-cultural background	A single mother or father on social assistance A mother who is returning to school after raising children A youth (age 18-24) who has had a weak attachment to the workforce A Canadian Aboriginal or member of First Nations A recent newcomer to Canada with landed immigrant or refugee status who has learned English as a foreign language A Francophone who has learned English as a second language A member of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-gendered) community A person with a disability A member of a visible minority group A displaced manufacturing worker who is at least 40 years of age

Appendix J

Initial Interview Guide

Overview

To better understand the barriers to and motivators for learning in formal adult education for undereducated adult learners enrolled in selected programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

To better understand the learning needs that are met or not met in formal adult education for undereducated adult learners enrolled in selected programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

To better understand the academic and personal growth in formal adult education for undereducated adult learners enrolled in selected programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

To better understand the knowledge gained about the value of learning in formal adult education for undereducated adult learners enrolled in selected programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

These are six guiding questions that flow from the research questions:

1. Please describe the programme you are in.
2. What motivated you to take this programme?
3. What barriers did you face in entering this programme?
4. What do you think you need from this formal adult education programme?
5. How do you feel you will grow academically or personally from taking this formal adult education programme?
6. How valuable do you think formal adult education programmes are compared with other more informal ways of learning?

Appendix K

Weekly Electronic Critical Incident Reports/Journal Reflections

Instructions for Participation

The purpose of the weekly electronic Critical Incident Reports/Journal Reflections submitted by e-mail to the researcher is to capture your thoughts, feelings, and experiences on a regular basis as you participate in your programme. The following prompts are simply guidelines to help you with your reflections. You may respond to each question each week, or just certain questions each week or you may simply communicate what you think would be important to say. Do not be concerned about how concise or grammatically correct your reports are; it is more important that you reflect carefully and say what you want to say.

Your name will be kept confidential with the Principal Student Researcher and will not be associated with any of the responses given in your reports when the research report is compiled. The researcher may want to use some of your responses as anonymous quotes in the research report that provides an example of important ideas.

Reflections:

1. What engaged me the most this week in class or outside of class?
2. What made me feel most distant or negative this week in class or outside of class?
3. What was most affirming/supportive or helpful this week in class or outside of class?
4. What was most puzzling or confusing this week in class or outside of class?
5. What surprised me the most this week in class or outside of class?

Appendix L

Final Interview Guide

Overview

To better understand the barriers to and motivators for learning in formal adult education for undereducated adult learners enrolled in selected programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

To better understand the learning needs that are met or not met in formal adult education for undereducated adult learners enrolled in selected programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

To better understand the academic and personal growth in formal adult education for undereducated adult learners enrolled in selected programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

To better understand the knowledge gained about the value of learning in formal adult education for undereducated adult learners enrolled in selected programmes offered by Ontario school boards or their arms-length affiliate.

To better understand how the learner experienced changes in himself/herself or in his/her understanding of AET programmes as a result of participating in an AET programme.

These are six guiding questions that flow from the research questions:

1. Please describe how you have experienced learning in this programme,
2. What has motivated you to continue in this programme?
3. What barriers have you faced while continuing in this programme?
4. What needs of yours have been met in taking this programme? What needs of yours have not been met in this programme?
5. How have you have grown academically or personally in this adult education programme?
6. How valuable has this formal adult education programme been to you compared with what you might expect of other more informal ways of learning? Why do you think many adults are not participating in AET that is available?

Appendix M

Initial Categories of Description by Participant and by Interview Question

	Q1 MOTIVES/ BARRIERS		Q2 NEEDS MET/ NOT MET		Q3 ACADEMIC/ PERSONAL GROWTH		Q4 VALUE/ NON PARTICIPATION		Q5 CHANGE
	Motivators for AET	Barriers to AET	Needs met in AET	Needs not met in AET	Academic growth in AET	Personal growth in AET	Value of formal AET	Rationale for non- participation in AET	Changes in self or understanding AET
A	dreams understanding needs more building confirmation family/friends change must work classmates prior learning	age ability quantity social time academics govt funding support	understanding details big picture confidence confirmation modelling learning from others academic surpassed expect's more than textbook relevance extra help passionate teachers	intrapsychic relations	groundwork teacher commitment support memorizing new sector knowledge applied knowledge balancing theory & practice field knowledge overwhelm. in-depth	positive thinking risk-taking desire to learn resourceful confidence self image taking control having initiative inspiration commitment recognizes limits balance of responsibility working with people networking self respect pride comfort gratitude	credential career counseling confidence goal setting co-op & theory valuable exploration financially viable engaged small class size foot in the door active learning teamwork less competitive supportive classmates camraderie	daunting negative school experience negative perception willpower	Vague sense of being changed realize learning is a privilege sense of right time realizes ball is in court
B	dreams support opportunity paid discovery career counselor enjoyment HS diploma credentials accomplishment portfolios boredom networking	support school records	credential support go forward how to learn continuing ed. overcoming fear promise of career promise of income knowing education process		learning style math reading	commitment work ethic punctuality positive attitude leadership transforming changing social relations life balance	valuable another chance exploration choices	Income vs. education starting is hard companies should help employers entice	change in goals reordering of work- life balance
C	ease of entry please parents future friends/family paid accessible adult treatment classmates teacher support money vs meaning trades pay	self image low literacy didn't care people returning theory disconnected finances taste of money	knowledge exploration money forced routine impressed	math funding unsure transparent finances	training won't help GED help good teachers relevance	personality maturity responsibility self acceptance conflict management politics assertiveness how to get educated presence intrapsychic self esteem enjoyment commitment	advisable another chance end point practical ok assumptions satisfactory GED offered help caring earn while learning life skills	lack of awareness	change toward positive attitude couldn't have seen himself in this training 2 yrs ago.

	Q1 MOTIVES/ BARRIERS		Q2 NEEDS MET/ NOT MET		Q3 ACADEMIC/ PERSONAL GROWTH		Q4 VALUE/ NON PARTICIPATION		Q5 CHANGE
	Motivators for AET	Barriers to AET	Needs met in AET	Needs not met in AET	Academic growth in AET	Personal growth in AET	Value of formal AET	Rationale for non- participation in AET	Changes in self or understanding AET
C	responsibility parental influence small class kicked out ease of entry need for help future word of mouth knowledge accumulation govt funding labour mkt accessibility apprenticeship's jobs					punctuality pleasing others transformation better attitude self reflection attendance listening short term vs. long future			
D	online cohort diploma experience teacher support perception caring finances pride role model adjustment resume response competition interviews instructional style multiculturalism	Computer skills age self- confidence govt funding unknown readiness test- anxiety timeframe high demand time constraints accessible awareness support limitations loss reliance persistence exhaust savings math skills credential specificity of jobs paperwork for co-op competition	industry's needs future credential security help with job search targeted experience targeted courses employment progress job finding assistance balance of assistance credential	Job placement how to find job non- specific job finding	good teacher	politics advocacy insight pragmatism transformation confidence duty self reflection role model realistic	Physical contact online not for every gives status relevance necessity specific	experience vs. credential finances devalue understanding age perception not required previously reality physical ability worth it puzzle pieces fierce competition	Realizing labour market a challenge realizing his age begin again realizing actually needs education increased self- confidence realizing self- responsibility realizing general B.A. not worth much
E	desire job diploma nonunionized job loss employers relevance back to work need	assessment levels relocating	diploma fast-track scheduling accessible knowledge		practical insight resume writing	commitment	need to learn	lack insight resist change	More desirous and apt to learn Realizing need to have education

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	Motivators for AET	Barriers to AET	Needs met in AET	Needs not met in AET	Academic growth in AET	Personal growth in AET	Value of formal AET	Rationale for non- participation in AET	Changes in self or understanding AET
	learning dropping out relocation								
F	free testing given responsibility good fit schedule individual attention prior learning credentials jobs research support timeframe don't give up payments advance success	test- anxiety ESL tight policy teacher intrapsychological govt funding stress gambling lack of network finding a job treatment private vs. public	knowledge advancement interests skills security understanding growth any diploma self definition	no co-op communication with employers		Problem solving responsibility conflict resolution transferable skills time management skills value of learning intrapsychological maturity	teacher responsibility teacher support quality transferable credential better pay stepping stone proves worth Canadian credential	fear of failure self awareness not able to do it	better understanding of previous field discovered enjoyment of learning relationship skills broadened increased maturity
G	govt funding practical learning helping others maturity personality finishing helping other positive thinking	literacy experience feelings fear of speaking theoretical approach previous HS exp. peer comparison disorganization family responses accessing govt funding classroom management lack of employer co-operation schedule confidence drama judged	education field others assurance career support family role model pride employment financial adult communication	teacher not focused teacher too lax immediate feedback	advancement starting point skills vs. experience thinking skills poor quality lower demands easier tests lower standards reading balance of teacher support show understanding apply learning balance teacher support practical learning	transferable skills time management skills positive thinking resourceful overcome social phobias comprehensive anxieties overcome hurdles confidence maturity confidence self talk speaking out better life skills transform self esteem	provides knowledge higher profile learning from others learn common sense not just forcing a job dislike self reflection peer pressure		Better self concept as a working person Confidence in speaking out
H	enjoyment helping others credential change contingency plan interests bridging	age for govt funding lack of network lack of govt flexibility unreasonable expectations classroom	diploma employment practical learning quality	pace availability of component surprise fee teacher fairness	Understanding why flourishing high marks concentrate	journey visual learning desire to learn more empathetic attendance effort teamwork enjoyment comparative	networking very valuable gift more if earning feeling forced		become more socially inclined self conscious of mature age faded

	Q1 MOTIVES/ BARRIERS		Q2 NEEDS MET/ NOT MET		Q3 ACADEMIC/ PERSONAL GROWTH		Q4 VALUE/ NON PARTICIPATION		Q5 CHANGE
	Motivators for AET	Barriers to AET	Needs met in AET	Needs not met in AET	Academic growth in AET	Personal growth in AET	Value of formal AET	Rationale for non- participation in AET	Changes in self or understanding AET
		mgmt lack of employer co-optation noise level maturity unclear plan B				interprsnl self conscious self motivation			
I	teacher support college mature student practical approach good teacher contract marks parental influence family expectations reach goal family values children's education confidence pride values landlord	adjusting to limited income slower thinking mother first mandatory math English poor skills teacher learning style reading govt docmnts new commnty confidence family care lack of income family pressure	math knowledge teacher support	teacher attntion teacher support	prep for college math progression learning	detrmtion change of values racial cmparisons respect for policies confusing intimidating docmnts persvrance initial strength life skills helping others dealing with stress emotional strength self cnfdnce optimism discrmntn ESP healing	Very valuable stepping stone not total flexibly teacher attention learning from others common experinces stress relief role model teacher support centre support		Recognize Visual Learning style realize learning is prgresion resistance to being defeated realizes self discipline just start, rest follows
J	enjoyment employment avoiding welfare job loss easier job better shift flexibility	math & English literacy school computer policies repeating courses age govt rqurmnts literay demand govt funding employer expect's educational rqurmnts language employer rspnsblty resources	HS diploma college prep case support funding teacher support	HS credits rnivrsty prep good marks computr skills	prep for college/univ literacy forced to learn	working hard better learner not that hard persistence	need to improve life avoid welfare job given a chance think future strategize can't with shifts	finances trnsprttn govt assistance don't care not necessary have a job don't realize physical exhaustn young family weekend online want rest	Realizing getting funding a real challenge Concludes employers don't care Become More resrcful recognize effort must be made learning is an opprtnty
	Gr 12 Funding reqmts force choice need	lack of cnfdnce self image slower thinking poor		teacher attntion teacher schdling	university prep	persistence work ethic positive attitude	huge – diploma high profile pride more		recognize funding issues impact availability of

	Q1 MOTIVES/ BARRIERS		Q2 NEEDS MET/ NOT MET		Q3 ACADEMIC/ PERSONAL GROWTH		Q4 VALUE/ NON PARTICIPATION		Q5 CHANGE
	Motivators for AET	Barriers to AET	Needs met in AET	Needs not met in AET	Academic growth in AET	Personal growth in AET	Value of formal AET	Rationale for non- participation in AET	Changes in self or understandg AET
K	education	organiz. skills fear of computers funder obstacles school computer policies hope don't know how					funding teacher patience ability to teach embarrass no privacy frustration good teachers		teachers self- detrmtntn even if frstrated

Appendix N

Participant Transcript Summaries

Abbey (Participant A)

The context for Abbey was participation in a skilled trade's programme that is designed to equip the learner with a broad curriculum related to the construction sector as well as on-the-job experience with a potential employer. The programme requires full-time attendance and spans approximately one year. It would be considered a non-formal AET programme. In terms of qualifying for the AET programme, Participant 6 had to meet certain government criteria as the programme was funded by a government agency. The criteria were that the participant had to be economically marginalized, the programme had to fulfill a human capital development purpose, and there must have been a level of assurance that the participant would complete the programme successfully. In summarizing the stance of Abbey in this phenomenographic study, she appeared highly internally motivated, had a good sense of where she was going based on where she had come from in her prior learning and work experience, was very positive about her choice of learning opportunity, was not about to let any fear of age or failure stop her in her quest to get the most out of this programme, felt that her most expressed needs were being met, was very responsive to the applied nature of the course, had felt that she had gained in significant areas of personal growth, and praised the value of this AET programme.

Bonnie (Participant B)

Bonnie was engaged in a year-long non-formal AET programme in an exploration of the construction trades. Having been in a sales field previously and with no formal education or training for the past 10 years, except for a short online course, she found it challenging adjusting to a return to study. Although nervous to start out, she was motivated by her excitement and her gratitude for having this opportunity that she felt she could not let go by. The main motivating factors in her choosing and continuing in this AET programme was her parents' encouragement, her observation of friends in the field who were enjoying it, her classmates who were supportive of one another, a sense of accomplishment when projects were completed, and the instructional support she received from knowledgeable teaching staff. Although expressing mainly positive experiences of her participation in this programme, she was torn between the potential benefits she perceived she would get from this new training and a well-paid career in sales that she had partly put on hold. Her most significant barrier in continuing in this programme was the need to work to earn some wages to help support herself while engaged in the full-time training programme. Having expressed her needs for taking the programme as gaining education, experience, and a credential, she found that what she was getting from the programme was a recognition that she knew how to learn. This was the impetus in her beginning to think about continuing her education after this programme in university-level study. Bonnie experienced academic growth in math, reading, and an understanding of the overwhelming amount of information to be learned in the field. In experiencing a leadership role in the programme, she recognized that it is not an easy task to gain respect from peers even though she felt she had earned their respect in the end. At this juncture in her programme, she expressed having a sense of being "changed" in a way that she could not describe except to say that her perception of her goals and of her personal relationships had changed. Bonnie believed that AET is valuable in the sense that it provides another opportunity for education that may have been missed when younger and an opportunity to explore a new career field. Her sense of why more undereducated people are not participating in AET was that they have financial responsibilities that would preclude them from taking time away from paid employment. She also felt that there is also an underlying fear that they will not be successful. One thing that could help is if employers would get more involved in sponsoring adult learners.

Carl (Participant C)

Carl's lived experiences were set in a non-formal trades exploration programme and formal studies for the GED. He became interested in the trades programme as a result of being enrolled in the GED programme. His enrolment in the GED was motivated primarily by his deference to his family. He was not sure throughout the study period what educational/training goals he would have for himself once the programmes were completed. Although he started into the programmes with a sense of being coerced and feeling angry, he discovered that he enjoyed the practical kinds of learning he was doing. He did not perceive that he could do this kind of learning at college or university, but recognized that he should do more research on that. Throughout the programme, he experienced the challenge he has with reading and

felt the math that was relevant to the trades seemed more palatable. Once the trades programme had ended, Carl reflected that he had become more responsible for himself, had developed a better attitude towards school compared to that which he had had in high school, had improved on his interpersonal relations with classmates recognizing the part he must play in order to maintain good relations, and had begun to think more in terms of his future career and ability to earn wages. He began to evaluate the investment of time in the skilled trades with the potential pay-off financially in the future. Carl found his AET programmes to be valuable in many respects.

Dan (Participant D)

The AET programme within which Dan was engaged was a six-month, full-time formal training programme in the field of Supply Chain Management. As a 43-year old chemical plant worker most recently in the shipping and receiving field, he learned with little notice and with many years of service behind him that his employer was closing the plant. With a little adjustment help from the company and a fluke meeting with an employment counselor from the YMCA, he sought and received funding from the Second Career initiative of the Ontario provincial government to attend this AET programme. Although the programme would not offer a co-operative education placement for work experience, Dan took the programme for the technical training and the offer of some job search assistance. The motivating factors for Dan in choosing this training was to get a credential which would not only help prepare him for the labour market, but also would be seen as a path to security for him supporting his family, and also to serve as a role model for his children. The barriers and challenges that he faced at the outset of this transition from work to school was the fear of how to provide for his family, the realization that the manufacturing industry could not support him any longer, and a sense that he was not receiving enough assistance from the employer whose plant was closing. Throughout the next step researching training programmes, he found that the funding agency's policies and procedures were limiting his access to certain programmes and causing the wait time to be extended unnecessarily in his opinion. He found he was caught at a time of high demand for funding for retraining and also found that many programmes were already filled. He found himself resorting to political tactics in order to get the attention he felt he deserved. Upon entry to the AET programme and throughout, he worked diligently and strategically to apply for jobs in related fields. Although highly positive throughout, he felt at times discouraged and depressed with the lack of response from employers to his job applications. He began to broaden his job search strategy to include considering, in addition to his full-time programme, taking other short-term, very specific certificate courses as he found employers were asking for experience and education in many fields at once. Dan indicated that his needs were to secure his future and saw the credential as having the potential to do this. He needed to get a job and to have more help in finding a job. He claimed that his technical knowledge in the supply chain field had grown immensely throughout the programme and that he was surprised at the many different career paths that he became aware of as a result. He began to self-reflect on things that he felt he should have been doing all along to prevent this situation of being jobless and he recognized that he has to take responsibility for the outcome. In terms of the value of formal AET, Dan believes that at least some postsecondary education is helpful, but that it must be in labour-market areas where there is a demand for skills and must be comprised of broad as well as specific kinds of learning. Dan perceives that the reasons more less-educated adults are not taking advantage of the AET system is that they have a lack of awareness of how to access the system; they do not have the time nor finances to do so; they feel they are too old so why bother with it; it is not worth the investment that they would have to make; they do not see the value in it for themselves; they feel disconnected from education and intimidated by the thought of returning to school; and the waiting out of the severance package that is received, is causing some individuals to delay getting started onto another pathway until it becomes too late.

Eva (Participant E)

Eva was enrolled in a 6-month, full-time formal programme with an arms-length organization to an Ontario public school board. She was learning skills related to supply chain and inventory management. The instructional style in the programme was teacher-directed for the supply chain curriculum and supervised self-directed study for the computer skill component. The programme offered a two-week co-operative education component toward the end of the study period. Her hope was that the employer host would offer employment at the end of the programme. When Eva became aware of the Second Career initiative through the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, she went to find out more about it. Although the wait time was about three months, she finally was given permission to start the programme with only two days notice. What she learned through the funding approval process was that she was deemed eligible under the Ontario Skills Grant rather than Second Career. This process appeared not

only to be about having the persistence to go through all of the steps, but also having a certain skill in communications and in navigating subjective responses of the funding agency counselor at times. The main motivating factor for Eva to search for retraining was a need for a new job as she recently had experienced a job loss from a manufacturing company where she had been for four years. A friend had urged her to take whatever she wanted, but to just have a diploma behind her. She was beginning to recognize that employers were requiring a credential and that employers were not necessarily asking for a particular kind of credential. Upon reflecting on doubts she may have had about taking this AET programme, Eva talked about the expectation of having to have an English and math assessment. She indicated that she might have liked to know about the math. An area of concern for her, as she progressed through the AET programme, was that she experienced herself as a quick learner in relation to some of the other students in the class, and as a result, she felt it difficult to study with them. An area that Eva felt could be improved in the programme was more flexibility to allow students to finish the computer skill component faster if in fact they could do so, but she was not sure if the funding agency would allow an early completion of the programme. Eva commented that she was much more apt to learn now as an adult than when she was in high school. Upon reflecting on what she felt was the value of formal adult education and training, she indicated that she thought it was valuable. She talked about the scheduling of this AET programme and the homework policy as positives for those people who have children at home.

Fedir (Participant F)

The lived experiences of Fedir found himself as a youth who had immigrated to Canada several years prior taking a formal AET program that was full-time for six months with the purpose of preparing himself with further training in a field where he had been working at an entry level. He was motivated to take this training because of his previous experience, to get a diploma in the field, and to eventually move up the career ladder. He found the payment plan offered by the school to be helpful and the fact that the programme was being offered in a condensed timeframe to that of a publicly funded college. Barriers and challenges included anxiety about the entry test, his level of reading and comprehension of English, a classroom policy with strict rules, and his ineligibility for government funding as he did not qualify under the Employment Insurance guidelines. Fedir was particularly disappointed that the programme did not offer a co-operative education placement in order to gain further work experience. Academically, the programme was forcing him to think and was improving his memory skills, study skills, and time management skills. He particularly appreciated an improvement in his reading and comprehension. Personally, he felt he broadened his relationship skills among his fellow classmates and teachers and reflected on his conflict resolution skills. To Fedir, formal AET programmes are valuable for the teacher support that is available and are of better quality. Gaining a credential is valuable especially if it can be transferable to other jobs. This kind of education and training can also serve as a stepping stone to other training programmes and/or better jobs. As an immigrant, having a Canadian credential is considered by him to be invaluable.

Gayle (Participant G)

The lived experiences of Gayle in her full-time formal AET programme to prepare as a Personal Support Worker was offered by an arms-length organization to a publicly funded Ontario school board and was designed to prepare individuals for a career in the health care field. Gayle was funded by the regional government to take this training which included both theoretical and practical components and led to an accredited certificate from the training organization upon adhering to curriculum guidelines set out by the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Ontario Long Term Care Association. Gayle felt inspired toward this field from experience with a family member resident in a long term care facility, by a growing self-awareness that she had the requisite qualities needed for this type of work, her acknowledged desire to help others in need, and support from family members and government financial assistance. Barriers and challenges she faced in the AET programme included apprehensiveness about her age in relation to others in the class, anxiety about the full-time nature and early hours of the programme schedule and their effect on her family's needs, an impatient attitude at times from the government funding representative, securing on her own a workplace host for her practical experience, writing tests and public speaking, learning specialized terminology, a demanding schedule, uncomfortable self-reflection activities, and the distracting group dynamics within the classroom. Primary needs in the programme for Gayle were to become more knowledgeable, to be able to help others, to prove that she could learn, to prepare for a career that she would enjoy, and to support her family. She expressed a feeling of pride in her accomplishments to date, her enjoyment of the experience of applying her new knowledge, and her growing sense of getting her adult self-image back. Gayle recognized that her development in the AET programme was a shared responsibility between her and her teacher. Her feelings of growth were expressed as consisting mainly in the personal

domain as she experienced herself as starting to overcome her social phobia, working outside of her comfort zone, gaining an expanded sense of understanding from the recognition of others' perspectives, speaking out more confidently, transferring new life skills to her family, and having a greater sense of self-esteem that she was being seen now as a working person. The value of formal adult education and training to Gayle was experienced as a vehicle to quench her thirst for knowledge and to learn about others' perspectives. She believes that less-educated adults are on a relative basis not participating in formal AET because of a sense of complacency due to a sense of comfort at having raised their children or the security of a disability pension, lack of awareness about what training is available, a sense of being too old, an inability to recognize the rewards of education including the sense of the inherent accomplishment, a lack of common sense about choosing AET as a way to direct one's life, a choice not to take responsibility for one's education, and the fact that choosing and participating in AET is a complex decision dependent upon many factors.

Haley (Participant H)

The participation by Haley was in a full-time, 7-month, formal skills training programme to prepare for a career as a Personal Support Worker. The AET programme was offered by an arms-length organization to a publicly funded Ontario school board. The programme issued a PSW certificate based on the guidelines of the Ontario Long-Term Care Association and senior secondary school credits under the Ontario Ministry of Education. The instructional strategy was teacher-directed and included assignments, case-studies, and work experience. Haley received funding to attend this programme from Ontario Works after narrowly missing the entry window for Second Career funding from Employment Ontario. Haley experienced this AET programme as being top quality. Factors motivating Haley to pursue this field was her prior experience as a caregiver to an elderly relative and her desire to help others. She felt a sense of gratitude that she was given the opportunity to participate and expressed a wish that others would not take the learning opportunity for granted. Getting a credential in order to maximize chances of getting a well-paying job with benefits was a further motivation. The challenges Haley experienced were getting to programme-related appointments while attending classes, having the time to search for an appropriate community placement for work experience, and dealing with the disruption she felt by other students in the classroom. She believed this programme was meeting her primary needs to get a credential, to do hands-on work, and to have a good quality learning experience. Her disappointments centred on the lack of predictability sometimes in the programme specifically the pace of study. She experienced her academic growth as an expanded understanding which gave her more empathy. She attributed her high marks to her maturity and her sense of responsibility as a learner to attend classes and put in a high level of effort. To Haley, formal AET was valuable in getting a credential in order to find a well-paying job. Further value was in the programme's ability to be a stepping stone to a pathway to higher education. In reflecting on why the undereducated adults are less represented in adult education, she commented that for those who have to work to make a living and/or who have children to care for, a comprehensive curriculum that is compressed into a shorter timeframe than that of a postsecondary diploma or degree programme, may be too demanding for them. A further factor she observed was the lack of network, such as finding a doctor if you were new to the geographic area, which could be a problem for some. She felt that in some cases, especially for those who receive income assistance from the government, adults are deterred by the system of support that meets their basic needs without having to re-educate themselves.

Isi (Participant I)

In the AET programme engaged in by Isi, it was evident that she had both positive experiences and some challenges. She was pursuing a formal upgrading course in senior high school mathematics as a prerequisite for entry to a publicly funded College programme. Although this upgrading programme was funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education, she was concurrently researching funding options with Employment Ontario for a college diploma programme in social work. She would learn the complexities of accessing income and training support from the Ontario government. Isi claimed to be motivated to enroll in the AET programme as she was concerned about a lack of opportunity for herself and her children. She was motivated also by her desire to learn so that she could help others learn. Choosing to pursue further education gave her a sense of hope for the future. Helping her to stay motivated in the programme was the level of support she received from her teacher and a growing level of confidence through a practical approach to learning and a sense of pride in her accomplishment. Although not highly motivated by the pursuit of materialistic goals, she did address her need for a reasonable level of income earning potential through education to meet her basic needs. While continuing to feel motivated throughout the AET programme, Isi experienced some challenges along the way. In the beginning, she experienced not having

enough instructional help with her math course claiming that the pace of the curriculum was too fast. She recognized this as a factor of returning to school after a long period away from study. She realized about herself that she was reluctant to ask for help out of fear of appearing stupid. In a related theme, she experienced anxiety at having to prepare for the upcoming mature student test in English and mathematics for acceptance to a College diploma programme. Another area of challenge for Isi was that of having to make the financial adjustment from a full-time job which she had held prior to receiving a permanent lay-off to receiving government income support. Moreover, she was providing support for a friend who was terminally ill. Her academic growth in the AET programme was described as feeling prepared in the area of math for College and for application in real life situations. She came to a realization that her math learning was simply mastering a progression of concepts. On a more personal note, she experienced development in her ability to help others and her children in the area of math, in her ability to manage stress and maintain expectations for schoolwork, and in her determination to reach her goals. Less-educated adults are not participating in the opinion of Isi because of a lack of awareness of options, the time-intensive nature of returning to school, availability of financial resources, facing the challenges of returning to school, the lack of a pressing need, a contentment with an achieved level of formal education, lack of projecting into the future the impact that further education might have, and simply the lack of interest in overcoming a sense of inertia about further AET.

Joelle (Participant J)

Joelle found herself, after being displaced from the manufacturing field, in formal English and mathematics upgrading courses at the secondary school level at a publicly funded Ontario school board. Her goal was to achieve the Ontario Secondary School Diploma as a pre-requisite for eligibility to pursue a college diploma programme. Her programme employed the instructional style of self-study within a classroom with others studying at their own pace but under the supervision of an Ontario-certified teacher. Joelle had gone through the process of applying to the Second Career programme of Employment Ontario for funding for her plans for postsecondary training which included high school upgrading as part of her education plan. Motivators for Joelle to pursue AET was the loss of her long-time job in the sawmill industry, her subsequent recognition that she would need to earn the Grade 12 diploma as a minimum for eligibility for another job, her distaste for working shifts and at a physically demanding job in manufacturing, and a desire to attend college for retraining. She was continuing to be motivated in her AET programme by her sense of enjoyment, flexible study schedule, and experience of making progress. The challenges that Joelle experienced were at first her apprehension at beginning a programme where she did not know what to expect, the onerous process of applying for government funding, the prohibitive costs of travelling to appointments during the application process, and her initial level of English proficiency in learning the curriculum. Later, her challenges included her experience in the self-study classroom of not getting timely assistance from the teacher because of other students demanding time and, personally, her adjusting to a much tighter personal financial budget without her former income. The overriding need of Joelle in this AET programme was to achieve her high school diploma in preparation for applying to a publicly funded college programme. Her immediate need that was being satisfied was that computer technology was helping her deal with her studies by allowing concurrent access to word processing and online dictionary resources. She also felt her need for financial support was being met. Again, a bone of contention about her transition from paid employment to retraining was the lack of employer support for adjustment services. Academically, Joelle was experiencing progress especially in her ability with written English. She found herself becoming more resourceful in finding the help she needed for writing. Personally, she sensed herself using perseverance, taking responsibility for her learning, and being adaptable. Her self-image of a learner was improving. Valuable to her in taking this AET programme was that it was addressing a need she had, providing the potential for improved life circumstances and being able to avoid welfare, and ultimately, in finding a new job. The reason that other undereducated adults were not taking part in AET opportunities was thought to be, from Joelle's perspective, a lack of recognition of the connection between education and a career, a factor of laziness or apathy, a lack of wherewithal to overcome the challenges of applying for government funding, a lack of personal finances, a low sense of self-responsibility, and lack of perseverance.

Kyle (Participant K)

Kyle was pursuing high school credits in a formal programme to upgrade some previous marks and also to complete the required credits to earn the Ontario Secondary School Diploma for the purpose of becoming eligible to apply to university. He was attending a programme specifically designed for adults. The instructional method was self-study with one course being delivered online in conjunction with an

Ontario-certified teacher. Kyle was required by the Workers Safety and Insurance Board following a workplace injury to pursue a prescribed education plan. Apart from being required to pursue further education and training, he understood he had to take further training in order to re-enter the workforce in a different capacity. The challenges he experienced included frustration over a recommended field of study of teaching as he felt there would not be good job potential for him after a four-year postsecondary education plan. His feeling of lack of control over his future choices and his lack of knowledge about potential careers contributed to his feelings of frustration. Areas in which he was experiencing discomfort was in what he perceived to be his poor computer skills, a sense of embarrassment in asking the teacher for help, and a disappointment in the classroom set-up where there was little privacy in discussing educational matters with the teacher. The need to earn his high school diploma and to improve his computer skills was primary and he expressed that he was enjoying the learning. A need that was not being met to his satisfaction was the accessibility of teachers for specific subjects as all teachers did not have scheduled hours every day. In terms of academic growth, Kyle felt he was improving on his independent study skills—important for future study at university and he felt a sense of pride at the excellent marks he was achieving and at his level of persistence when the learning got frustrating at times. He claimed that his positive attitude was essential. In commenting on the value of formal AET, Participant K expressed having a sense of pride as a mature student as they are recognized by public figures in a positive manner.